# Lacan’s Theory of Language Part 2
## The Basic Framework

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OCTOBER 11, 1997

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Sigmund Freud is renowned for having developed a theory of human psychopathology, and a corresponding method of psychotherapy, known as psychoanalysis, which he put forth as a scientific theory. However, Freud’s theory was not based upon the commonly accepted premises of the sciences, nor on hard empirical evidence; it was based on the scientifically disreputable ground of metaphors of biology and physics, myths, dreams, jokes, and other equally ephemeral phenomena.

As a consequence, Freud’s theory has suffered the disdain of the scientific community. Those who consider themselves to be scientific psychopathologists have either rejected Freud’s insights or tried to transplant them into the commonly accepted ground of biology and physics. And most of those who consider themselves to be followers of Freud have considered it to be necessary to try to make Freud’s theory more palatable to the scientific community, so they have cooked it in one way or another, with the result that what passes for Freudian theory now bears little resemblance to Freud’s theory.

This bifurcated trend of “development” away from Freud’s theory has not been particularly successful. The field of psycho-science is now fractured into a chaotic conglomeration of theories, some based on biology, some on chemistry, some psychology, some on communication, some on feelings, and some on none of the above. But almost all of these theories are alike in being conceptually incoherent, empirically inadequate, and practically useless.

Given the futility of these “developments” in the psycho-sciences, it is reasonable to question the commonly held premises that have guided these developments. One wonders if Freud might not have been quite as misguided as is commonly believed for having based his theory on metaphor and myth rather than on biology. Perhaps psychopathology is a function of something other than biology. But, if so, what could something else be? Here is where we come to Jacques Lacan.

After trying for many years to make sense of human psychopathology (which is one of the two distinctive characteristics of the human species) in the framework of the medical model, i.e., as a function of biology, Lacan arrived at the hypothesis that human psychopathology is not a function of biology, but of language (the other of the two distinctive characteristics of the human species). On the basis of this hypothesis Lacan transformed Freud’s theory of psychopathology from the language of myths and metaphors into the language of a theory of language. Lacan translated Freud’s metaphors of eighteenth century mechanics (drives, flows of energy, and blockages of flows) into the language of linguistic theory (drives become words, flows of energy become metaphors and metonymies, and blockages become ellipses, anacolutha, etc.). And Lacan translated Freud’s myth of the Oedipus complex into the paradox that is inherent in the logic of the word, or more generally, the paradox that is inherent in the logic of the symbolic type of sign. And Lacan translated Freud’s myth of the murder of the father of the primal horde into the pragmatic force of the symbolic type of law, which is most primitively embodied in the first of the symbols, the father of all symbols, which is the negative word, in English, “No.” Pursuing this line thought and putting it into the practice of psychoanalysis over the course of some fifty years Lacan developed a comprehensive and sophisticated theory of psychopathology and psychoanalysis.

Lacan began to translate Freud’s theory into the framework of the theory of language put forth by Ferdinand de Saussure, one of the founders of the science of linguistics, in a work that was first published in 1915. Saussure’s theory is now considered to be somewhat simplistic, but it was all Lacan had at the time. And it was more than Freud had: when Freud began to develop his theory of psychopathology there was no science of linguistics. That is why Freud had to make do with metaphors and myths (which are symbolic representations of the real that the sciences of biology and physics are about) instead of a theory of language (which is also a system of symbolic representations of the real that biology and physics are about). So while Freud did not realize that it is language itself that is the basis of psychopathology, he did realize that it was something other than biology, and so he departed from biology in the right direction, i.e., in the direction of the symbolic.

Although Lacan began with Saussure’s theory of language, he soon found it necessary to modify and extended Saussure’s theory in profound ways. For example, Saussure assumed that the signified is conceptually prior to the signifier, but Lacan insisted that the signifier is prior to the signified. From the beginning Lacan’s thinking about language was enriched by the thinking of Lévi-Strauss. And before long Lacan’s thinking about language was radically transformed by the linguistic theory of Roman Jakobson, and through Jakobson by the theory of logic and the theory of signs of Charles S. Peirce. Over the years then, Lacan not only transformed Freud’s theory of psychopathology into a legitimate scientific theory of psychopathology based on a theory of language, but in doing so he also developed a theory of language that is sophisticated and robust enough to serve as the foundation of a theory of human psychopathology. And, I am suggesting, Lacan’s theory of language is also far more adequate as a theory of language than the theory of language that currently dominates the field of linguists.
Of course Lacan’s theory of language is for the most part only implicit in his discourse on psychopathology, which is not only voluminous, but also notoriously complex, even refractory. Nevertheless, it is possible to extract Lacan’s theory of language from his discourse on psychopathology and to put it forth as a theory of language. That is what I propose to do here. Or at least that is what I propose to begin to do.

The purpose of this essay, then, is to explain the basic framework of ideas underlying Lacan’s theory of language as it evolved from the thinking of his intellectual ancestors. I will begin by providing a somewhat more detailed account of Lacan’s linguistic ancestry.

1. LACAN’S LINGUISTIC ANCESTRY

First, a terminological clarification: as we delve into Lacan’s linguistic ancestry I am forced to confess that up to this point I have allowed my discussion of Lacan’s theory of language to be framed by the somewhat misleading presupposition, implicit in the expression “Lacan’s theory of language,” that Lacan had only one theory of language. The fact is that Lacan’s theory of language changed over time. For our purposes we can distinguish three phases, or three theories. In this section I will briefly discuss the evolution of these three phases in order to gain insight into the depth of Lacan’s thinking about language. But in the next section, when I undertake a more detailed to a discussion of Lacan’s theory of language, I will revert to the presupposition of singularity implicit in the expression “Lacan’s theory of language,” intending the expression to refer to the third phase of Lacan’s theory of language.

The first phase can be called “pre-linguistic.” In the beginning of his published work Lacan’s theory was the theory that is held by what linguists call “the linguistically naive speaker,” which means the normal person. In other words, Lacan, like Freud, assumed the conventional “folk” theory of language, the theory of language that is implicit in language itself, the default theory of language which all normal people emerge from childhood with, and which they continue to unconsciously hold throughout life, unless some shocking event strikes them in such a was as to force them to undertake a critical re-examination of their linguistic assumptions.

The second phase can be called “linguistic.” According to Roudinesco (1990, p. 144) this phase began in 1946 when Lacan first “read the work of Ferdinand de Saussure, which he had learned of from Claude Lévi-Strauss.” In other words, the second phase began with his discovery of the linguistic point of view. This discovery set in motion in Lacan’s mind “the process of rethinking the Freudian theory of the unconscious in the light of structural linguistics.” In this phase it is clear from Lacan’s ideas, from his vocabulary (e.g. “signifier” and “signified”), and from his explicit attributions, that Lacan’s theory of language was based primarily on Saussure’s theory of language. There are also indications of influence from Benveniste and some other linguists, and from Lévi-Strauss, but at this stage Lacan’s theory of language is preeminently the dualistic framework of the Saussurian theory of language. Though in saying that Lacan’s theory is Saussure’s theory one must bear in mind that Lacan introduced some radical revisions of Saussure’s theory, notably the inversion of priority between signifier and signified.

The third phase began, according to Roudinesco (p. 305), in 1950 when Lacan first met Roman Jakobson. From this point on, Jakobson’s theory of language would come to exercise a more and more pervasive influence on Lacan’s thinking about language. Jakobson’s influence was described by Roudinesco (p, 297) as follows:

\textit{It may be shown that Lacan effected two successive readings of Saussure’s work. The first occurred before 1953... [and]...between 1953 and 1963, he would have to reread Saussure from a Jakobsonian perspective...}

There is one remarkable fact about the influence of Jakobson on Lacan that I think should be mentioned parenthetically: Lacan seemed to ignore much of Jakobson’s theory of language, including the ideas that linguists generally consider to be Jakobson’s greatest contributions to the theory of language, namely the principle of markedness, which permitted linguists to apprehend the universals of markedness in language, and thus enabled them to perceive the stratificational structure that is characteristic of all systems of language. Lacan overlooked these parts of Jakobson’s thinking, which deal with relatively concrete and empirically verifiable aspects of language, to focus almost exclusively on the fundamental dualistic architectonic, which is very abstract and correspondingly difficult to grasp. It is not easy to see why Lacan entirely ignored such a large and important part of Jakobson’s thinking. But he did, and I think this seeming anomaly is a very important in trying to understand Lacan’s thinking. Here I will not try to explain this negative anomaly, this gap, this marked absence, but will focus instead on the positive fact that Lacan took Jakobson’s dualistic architectonic as the basic framework, the paradigm of his theory of language.
Roudinesco described the force of Lacan’s discovery of Jakobson’s dualistic architectonic as “amazement.”

A few months before delivering his lecture on L’instance de la lettre, he discovered with amazement Fundamentals of Language, published by Jakobson and Morris Halle in the Hague. The book contained an article entitled “Two Aspects of Language and Two Types of Aphasia,” which would allow him to polish his hypothesis of a language-unconscious. With that text, Lacan was able to accomplish a fertile reading of the Traumdeutung. (p. 305, emphasis added)

I think Roudinesco’s description of the effect of this amazing discovery is misleading understatement: it was not that this amazing discovery “will allow” Lacan to “polish” his hypothesis, but rather, as one can see in Lacan’s subsequent publications, the discovery of this seminal idea moved Lacan to a radical reformulation of his theory of language and his theory of psychopathology. The discovery of Jakobson’s dualistic architectonic gave Lacan, not just a radically new paradigm of language, but a deeply insightful and very powerful new theory of language. I see this event as follows: Lacan had long been seeking something, and he found it in Jakobson’s dualistic architectonic.

Even though Lacan’s discovery of Jakobson’s dualistic architectonic had such a profound influence, it should be emphasized that this discovery is just the beginning of Jakobson’s influence on Lacan. In some cases through the following years Lacan explicitly stated that his thinking had been influenced by one or another of Jakobson’s publications. And in other cases Lacan simply adopted Jakobson’s ideas without explicit attribution. A noteworthy example of the former is Jakobson’s analysis of pronouns as “shifters,” which led directly to Lacan’s very important conceptualization of the subject as a symbol, a pronoun, a mere place holder, a point of reference, implied in the logic of discourse. An example of the latter is Lacan’s tripartite categorization - real, imaginary, and symbolic, which we will return to discuss in detail below.

Also indicative of the nature of Lacan’s relationship with Jakobson, it should be mentioned that on more than one occasion in his seminars Lacan made a special point of calling attention to the fact that Jakobson was present. And what is most important, the relationship between Lacan and Jakobson was not just an academic one: they became friends. There is much evidence of this, though most of it is not published. According to Roudinesco (p. 305) Jakobson stayed with Lacan at his home when he went to Paris. And, according to Ellie Ragland (personal communication), Lacan stayed in Jakobson’s home when he went to Boston. So there is every reason to believe that Jakobson thinking had a very profound effect on Lacan’s thinking about the theory of language, beginning with this primitive dualistic architectonic.

1.1. JAKOBSON’S DUALISTIC ARCHITECTONIC

Perhaps it would be appropriate at this point to begin to set forth Lacan’s theory of language by describing this dualistic architectonic and by explaining why Lacan took it as the fundamental paradigm of language. The key to understanding this seminal point in the development of Lacan’s thinking is to realize what it was that amazed Lacan, what it was that he realized in reading Jakobson’s discussion of the two modes of mental functioning. And what Lacan realized, as described in part by Roudinesco (p. 304-307), was that he and Freud and Saussure and Jakobson were using different technical terms in different universes of discourse to try to describe the same primitive dualism. So to understand the primitive dualism that underlay the thinking of these four students of language, and to understand how Lacan maps between his own thinking and Jakobson’s thinking and Saussure’s thinking and Freud’s thinking, one must be aware of the deep isomorphism that Lacan became aware of at this time between the various pairs of technical terms the four scholars used.

So the key to decrypting this multiplicity of technical terms and unifying these seemingly different frames of reference is to understand the underlying system of pairwise terminological correlations as set forth in Table 1. Indeed, as I will explain below, this table itself is an iconic representation of the primitive dualistic architectonic that Lacan, following Jakobson, Saussure, and Freud, sees as the very root of language. Thus to understand this table is to understand what Lacan came to realize in reading about Jakobson’s two aspects of language.

What is being represented in this table, to explain it in words, is the two dimensional conceptual space of language. This is an iconic representation, in tabular form, which we will amplify and clarify as the discussion develops, of the logical space in which language is conceptualized. Just as trees grow in physical space so does language grow in this logical space. And just as the shape of a tree is a function of the space in which it grows, so is the shape of language a function of the space in which it grows.
Table 1 The Basic Paradigm

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Metaphor</th>
<th>Metonymy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lacan</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jakobson</td>
<td>Similarity</td>
<td>Contiguity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>in absentia</td>
<td>in presentia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saussure</td>
<td>Paradigmatic</td>
<td>Syntagmatic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Unifying spirit</td>
<td>Separatist spirit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freud</td>
<td>Condensation</td>
<td>Displacement</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To be more specific about the two dimensions represented in this table, the vertical dimension represents the relation of sameness (substitutability) and the horizontal dimension represents the relation of difference, or contiguity, the quintessence of which is opposition. That is, the essence of contiguity is opposition: if a concept is defined as different from another, then the first possibility that comes to mind that satisfies that definition, the idea that is not another and yet nearest to that other, is the opposite. This so because the opposite is the same in every respect except one. In other words, opposition is as close to identity as possible. Thus “metaphor” is similar to “similarity” and “metonymy” is similar to “contiguity”, but “metonymy” is opposite to “metaphor”, and “contiguity” is opposite to “similarity” in a similar way.

It is probably not necessary to say that this description of this dualism is hard to understand. But it is hard to understand, not just because the description is so brief, but because this idea is very deep and very abstract. And what is more, the dualism is essentially paradoxical. Further, there is no commonly accepted prior context from which this dualism follows, so it seems to arise out of the blue in a totally arbitrary way. For this reason, in the absence of some underlying frame of reference that can motivate and ground this idea, it would seem that one could as well posit any other terminological dualism that might strike one’s fancy. Further, it is very difficult to understand such a complex and paradoxical idea without seeing how it works out in some simple specific examples, and I have given no specific examples so far. Further, even if, as I am assuming in this discussion, one is familiar with Lacan’s texts, that is not of much help in understanding the basic dualism because Lacan does not explain the evolution of his thinking and he does not provide simple examples. He just plunges into the deep waters, the very deepest and most turbulent waters of human psychopathology, using this dualism as an instrument of analysis, and, far from trying to help the reader, it seems as if he almost defies his reader to dare to follow him. Further, familiarity with the second order discussions of Lacan’s thinking, as far as my familiarity with this literature goes, is also not of much help. For example, Roudinesco’s discussion of this dualism, which I referred to above, is typical: the discussion covers three or four pages and does not explain the evolution of Lacan’s thinking and gives few, if any, examples to show how this dualism works. Typically in the Lacanian universe of discourse the dualism is simply assumed without critical analysis, and the fact that it came from Jakobson is about as far as anyone has gone in trying to understand the conceptual ground that underlies it. And as a matter of fact, not only is this dualism simply taken for granted among the students of Lacan as the foundation of Lacan’s thinking, but the idea is commonly mis-taken, misunderstood, as a result of which most secondary discussions and analyses of Lacan’s thinking are more or less seriously flawed.

Now that the discussion has developed to the point where I have been able to frame this very deep locus of misunderstanding in the Lacanian universe of discourse, and, for that matter, in the human universe of discourse in general, I can say that one of the purposes of this essay is to try to explain this primitive idea simply and clearly, and thus transform this fertile source of confusion into a source of understanding.

I will go on to explain Lacan’s basic idea in a positive sense in a moment, but first I think it would be useful to cite a specific example of the misunderstanding of Lacan’s basic idea in the literature. I will cite only one example, not because there is a shortage of examples, but for the sake of brevity. And I choose to cite this particular example because it is a simple and clear illustration of the most fundamental way in which one can misunderstand the logic of the metaphor/metonymy dualism in Lacan’s thinking.

The example of misunderstanding I cite is a paper entitled “Metaphor and Metonymy” by Russell Grigg (1994). Let me make it clear that I am not saying that this paper is totally wrong and useless. This paper cites a number of interesting examples of metaphor and metonymy which show that it is difficult to sort out the conceptual processes that are at work in language in general and more particularly that it is difficult to understand the myriad
specific types and subtypes of metaphor and metonymy. The point I want to make is that Grigg mis-takes the depth and the scope and the thrust of the idea that Jakobson and Lacan had in mind.

Grigg’s misunderstanding can be looked at on two levels. On the general level this misunderstanding is manifest in the way Grigg characterizes what Jakobson and Lacan are doing when they use the words “metaphor” and “metonymy.” Grigg thinks that they were intending to put forth a “comprehensive theory of metaphor” (p. 27). And thus his paper is a discussion of Lacan’s dualism as a theory of metaphor and metonymy, though in fact Grigg focuses, as Jakobson predicted, almost exclusively on metaphor. And when he grounds his discussion in the context of prior texts he cites various well known discussions of the theory of metaphor.

On the specific level Grigg cites numerous examples of tropes in which metaphor and metonymy are mixed up together in various complex and confusing ways. He characterizes such facts as contrary to Lacan’s theory.

Now, speaking to his misunderstanding on the general level, Grigg’s thinking that such “mixed” examples are contrary to Jakobson’s and Lacan’s dualism shows that he misunderstands the way this dualism works. Jakobson explicitly says in the above cited essay (p. 80) that there is no such thing a “pure” metaphor or “pure” metonymy in language.

A competition between both devices, metonymic and metaphoric, is manifest in any symbolic process

And speaking to his misunderstanding on the general level, Jakobson and Lacan are not thinking of this dualism as merely a theory of metaphor and metonymy. They are thinking of this dualism as the primitive dualistic architectonic which underlies and governs the whole realm of signs, and which therefore underlies language, and human behavior in general, including metaphor and metonymy.

The dichotomy here discussed appears to be of primal significance and consequence for all verbal behavior and for human behavior in general (Jakobson, op cit., p. 70)

 Jakobson and Lacan are thinking of this dualism as the most primitive matrix of language. And thus they were not trying to develop an explanation of metaphor and metonymy. Rather they merely discuss this pair of tropes as one of the myriad different ways in which this primitive dualism is manifest in language.

Although it might appear to be so, they are not saying that metaphor and metonymy enjoy a privileged status in the machinery of language. That this is so is evident in Jakobson’s text by the fact that he used the words “similarity” and “contiguity” rather than the words “metaphor” and “metonymy” as the names of the two axes of this basic dualism. Then, taking this dualism - similarity and contiguity - as a theoretical primitive, Jakobson tried to explain metaphor and metonymy as a function of similarity and contiguity. And in doing so he was trying to elevate this latter pair of words to the level of theoretical terms, to the level of theoretical metalanguage.

But Lacan, quite correctly, rejected the idea that there are higher and lower levels of language, which is to say, Lacan rejected the idea that there could be a theoretical metalanguage. In an essay entitled “Science and Truth” (Lacan 1989 p. 16) he said exactly that:

there is no such thing as a meta-language

I want to emphasize, that this not just a trivial point: this is one of the most basic and thus most important premises of Lacan’s theory of language. And this premise sets Lacan’s theory of language apart from the whole class of currently prevailing linguistic theories, such as Chomsky’s theories.

In Lacan’s view the words “similarity” and “contiguity” are no less elements of ordinary language, no less subject to the fundamental paradox of representation, than are the words “metaphor” and “metonymy.” For this reason Lacan provocatively insisted on using the words “metaphor” and “metonymy,” albeit somewhat confusingly, as the names of the two axes of this basic dualism. Thus Lacan is guilty of using the same words to refer both to the two types of tropes of language and to refer to the fundamental dualistic architectonic underlying language. So when Lacan uses the words “metaphor” and metonymy” he does not necessarily mean what those words are ordinarily used to mean, namely, the pair of tropes. Lacan often uses the words “metaphor” and “metonymy” in a metalinguistic sense to refer to the two axes of the dualistic architectonic underlying the realm of signs and thus underlying language itself. And, of course, there is no foolproof way to determine in any given instance which of these two types of meanings he intends. Or if he intends both at the same time. But, of course, this is the nature of language in general, and that is precisely the point that Lacan forces us to deal with by using the words “metaphor” and metonymy in this duplicitous way. He is saying, “Here is a duplicity at the heart of language, but it is not that I am choosing to be duplicitous, rather that language itself is duplicitous, and I refuse to go along with the pretense that it is possible to escape from the duplicity of language, to say something unduplicitous by using unduplicitous words, for there are no such things.”

So in order to understand Lacan’s theory of language, one must begin by trying to understand how he thinks about this dualism, and one must try to see how his theory of language evolves from the basis of this paradoxical dualism. The first requisite in trying to understand how he thinks about this dualism is to understand
how he takes this dualism. One must realize that he did not arrive at this idea inductively, but rather by a leap of insight, in consequence of which he took this dualism as the absolutely basic paradigm of a system of deductive reasoning, the matrix of a logic, the basis of a kind of evolutionary system of thought in which language develops, and by means of which he developed his theory of language and psychopathology. So Lacan does not think of this basic dualism as an inductive hypothesis that is to be refined little by little as new evidence comes to light, but rather, as I have been calling it, as the absolutely primitive logical architectonic which underlies and governs the realm of signs, and thus language, and thus psychopathology.

Then, having taken the proper orientation in relation to this dualism, one must try to understand this dualism both in terms of particular examples and in terms of the general idea. Both inductively and deductively. From the top down and from the bottom up. Looking from the top down one must try to see how this dualism is concretely manifest in some of the various dimensions of language, not just in the tropes of metaphor and metonymy. In this way one can see that it is not an arbitrary dualism, an ad hoc hypothesis, but that it is the very matrix of language and is manifest as such in every aspect of language. I will discuss various particular examples as the discussion develops, but for now consider a simple example in some detail.

Consider how this dualism comprises the conceptual space and time of the sentence in general by looking at a particular sentence such as the following:

*Ducks fly.*

As a function of the conventions of the English language, the word “ducks” is considered to be in a relation of potential substitutability with certain other words, such as “geese.” That is, in the framework of this sentence the word “geese” is counted, evaluated by the laws of English, as being similar to the word “ducks.” In other words, “Geese fly” is also a legal sentence of English, but, for example, “swim fly” is not. The latter is not a legal sentence in English because it violates the code, or law, of English. Another property of this relation between “duck” and “geese,” as specified in Table 1 on page 5, is that it is a relation in absentia. This is so because the word “geese” is not in the sentence “Ducks fly.” It is absent. It is a potential relation.

The word “fly” is enmeshed in a similar set of relations of similarity. The word “fly” is in a relation of potential substitutability with other words in English, a different set of words, one of which is “swim.” In other words, in the framework of this sentence “swim” is similar to “fly.” Thus “Ducks swim” is also a legal sentence of English. And this is also a relation in absentia.

And in a similar way, every word, and every phoneme, and every sentence, and every other element of language, is in a relation of potential substitutability with a set of similar elements. Such a set of similar elements is called a “paradigm.” The paradigmatic dimension is the counterpart in language of the dimension of space in the physical world. And it is important to bear in mind that this relation is a function of the code, the laws of a language. That is, it is not a real relation.

Turning now to the opposite relation, the relation of contiguity, it is important to bear in mind that this is not a function of the language, not a function of the code, but of some particular concrete sentence. In the particular example under consideration here, the words “ducks” and “fly” are in a relation of contiguity, not because the laws of English permit them to be put next to each other, but because they are next to each other in the above sentence. These two words are thus in a relation of presentia with each other in this particular sentence. And, they are not potentially substitutable equivalents: on the contrary, they belong to opposite sets, the set of nouns as opposed to the set of verbs. This is the syntagmatic dimension of language. And the syntagmatic dimension is the counterpart in language of the dimension of time in the physical world.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ducks</th>
<th>fly</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Geese</td>
<td>swim</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This analysis of the logic of a simple sentence demonstrates that the idea that there is a basic dualism underlying language is not arbitrary. This dualism is manifest as the two basic dimensions of form in language, the paradigmatic and syntagmatic, which taken together comprise the basic paradigm of language as represented in Table 2 below. And this example also demonstrates that the two predicates used to describe this relation, similarity and contiguity, were not just made up to explain metaphor and metonymy. As Jakobson explained, these two types of relations are a function of the union between language (as the abstract system of law governing the symbolic
mode of behavior) and speech (as the enactment in concrete reality of that mode of behavior.) And, of course, this union is intrinsic to language: speech is the embodiment of language, without which language would not have any existence at all, even the virtual, or parasitic, existence that it does have. So much for the top down way of looking at this dualism.

Now let us turn to the bottoms up way of looking at Lacan’s theory of language, which is the approach I will take throughout the rest of this paper. When I say that we also must try to understand Lacan’s theory of language by looking at it from the bottom up, what I mean is that Lacan’s theory of language is an evolutionary theory, and so we must try to see how Lacan’s theory of language evolves from the foundation of this dualism.

Of course it is important not to suppose that I am talking about biological or historical evolution here. What I am talking about here is the logical evolution of language. So, if we are to understand Lacan, we must be aware that (1) there is a kind of evolutionary logic, and (2) we must be aware that Lacan’s thinking was based upon this evolutionary logic, and (3) we must be aware that Lacan assumed that this evolutionary logic is the very logic of language, and (4) we must be aware that this evolutionary logic is a function of Jakobson’s similarity-contiguity dualism. These are some of the things that Lacan realized with “amazement” in the early 1950’s when he read Jakobson’s explanation of this primitive dualism. These four points can be taken as the set of premises that Lacan took from that moment of enlightenment as the basis of his thinking about language. And for this reason, in order to understand Lacan’s theory of language, one must look at it on the basis of these premises. So in the next section, as I try to outline Lacan’s theory of language, I will be assuming this set of premises as underlying Lacan’s theory of language and I explain his theory by showing how it evolves in accord with this set of premises.

Parenthetically, in order to preclude a possible misunderstanding of the idea of logical evolution as distinct from biological and historical evolution, I should say that this evolutionary logic is not entirely unrelated to biological and historical evolution: This evolutionary logic has both ontogenetic and phylogenetic manifestations in clock time both in the biological and historical dimensions. In other words, this evolutionary dualistic logic is manifest in biological and historical evolution. This is obvious, for example, in the historical evolution that is seen in the etymological layering of words, and in the progressive stages of child language development. So the point I want to make here is not that there is no such thing as biological or historical evolution, but that, at least in so far as language is concerned, the logic of evolution, this evolutionary dualistic logic, is conceptually prior to its manifestations in biological or historical evolution. Indeed, as Lacan makes abundantly clear, he holds that the historical dimension itself is a function of language, and thus a function of this fundamental evolutionary logic. To be more precise, as I mentioned in the discussion of the paradigmatic and syntagmatic dimensions above, in the realm of language the historical dimension is the syntagmatic dimension. So when we try to grasp how Lacan thinks about language, we must look at his thinking in terms of the evolutionary logic that is a function of this fundamental dualism, and we must bear in mind that it is not biological or historical evolution that we are trying to understand. So our focus is on this dualistic evolutionary logic and the process of logical evolution as manifest in language and in Lacan’s theory of language.

1.2. THE INFLUENCE OF PEIRCE

You may have noted that I have not yet talked about the contribution of C. S Peirce to Lacan’s thinking. This is so because it is not until we get down to the level of the dualistic paradigm in Lacan’s thinking that we can see Peirce’s influence. Lacan does not say much about how Peirce might have influenced his thinking. And since Peirce’s influence is at such a deep level, and since few students of Lacan are familiar with Peirce’s thinking, and vice versa, Peirce’s influence has gone unnoticed for the most part.

Of course, in the absence of explicit acknowledgment by Lacan my attribution of influence must be somewhat speculative. But it is apparent that Peirce had a very deep influence on Lacan. And what is more important, this is not just a matter of historical curiosity, because in my experience at least, Lacan’s thinking becomes easier to understand when it is seen in the context of Peirce’s thinking.

It is clear that Lacan made a big jump in going from the second to the third phase of his theory of language, and I believe he made this big jump with the help of Peirce in part, jumping from Saussure in the second phase to Jakobson and Peirce in the third phase. But Lacan never explained where he was talking from nor how he got there. He just jumped into his new theory of language, took it as the medium of his discourse, and expected his interlocutors to jump in too. Of course this obfuscated his discourse, veiling it in mystery and charging it with confusion and anxiety, but apparently that is what he intended to do. So perhaps in some ways I am doing a
disservice by trying to clarify the mystery and cut through the confusion by revealing what appears to be the key to his secret code, the missing ingredient in his theory of language, i.e., Peirce. But what are secrets for, if not to be revealed. So I will briefly mention some features of Lacan’s thinking that seem to have been influenced by Peirce, and then I will go on to show how Lacan’s theory of language evolves in the context of Peirce’s thinking.

First, as I said above, when Jakobson became familiar with Peirce’s thinking he recast his thinking about the basic dualism underlying language into the framework of Peirce’s categories and his theory of signs. And so, it would seem, did Lacan. I suggest that this was such an inviting step because of the fact that the dualism underlying language is an integral aspect of Peirce’s logical architectonic, as I will explain below. Indeed, it seems that it is the fact that Peirce had already thought of this dualism in the context of his tripartite architectonic that induced both Jacobson and Lacan to think of this dualism as an architectonic. I am not suggesting that Peirce invented the idea of looking at things from an architectonic point of view: Peirce explicitly attributed his use of this philosophical method to Kant. What I am suggesting is that Peirce made it possible for Jakobson and Lacan to take an architectonic point of view in relation to language because he had developed an architectonic framework for the dualism that both Jakobson and Lacan had already seen as the basic matrix of language.

In other words, Peirce’s logical architectonic provided the answer to the question that was implicitly being posed by Lacan’s dualistic paradigm, namely, where did it come from? Peirce’s logical architectonic provided a natural ground for Lacan’s dualistic paradigm. And in addition to the fact that Lacan’s dualism happens to fit perfectly in Peirce’s logic, Peirce had already explained how the dualism which Lacan was subsequently to discover, the dualism of similarity and contiguity, played out in language and logic and mathematics in ways that are so similar to the ways in which Lacan talks about the play of the signifiers that it seems impossible that the two dialogues could have come about independently. To illustrate the similarity I cite the following which Peirce calls a “disquisition upon the nature of language:”

4.157[2]...there are two modes of association of ideas: inner association, based on the habits of the inner world, and outer association, based on the habits of the universe. The former is commonly called association by resemblance; but in my opinion, it is not the resemblance which causes the association, but the association which constitutes the resemblance. An idea of a feeling is such as it is within itself, without any elements or relations. One shade of red does not in itself resemble another shade of red. Indeed, when we speak of a shade of red, it is already not the idea of the feeling of which we are speaking but of a cluster of such ideas. It is their clustering together in the Inner World that constitutes what we apprehend and name as their resemblance. Our minds, being considerably adapted to the inner world, the ideas of feelings attract one another in our minds, and, in the course of our experience of the inner world, develop general concepts. What we call sensible qualities are such clusters. Associations of our thoughts based on the habits of acts of reaction are called associations by contiguity, an expression with which I will not quarrel, since nothing can be contiguous but acts of reaction. For to be contiguous means to be near in space at one time; and nothing can crowd a place for itself but an act of reaction. The mind, by its instinctive adaptation to the Outer World, represents things as being in space, which is its intuitive representation of the clustering of reactions. What we call a Thing is a cluster or habit of reactions, or, to use a more familiar phrase, is a centre of forces. In consequence, of this double mode of association of ideas, when man comes to form a language, he makes words of two classes, words which denominate things, which things he identifies by the clustering of their reactions, and such words are proper names, and words which signify, or mean, qualities, which are composite photographs of ideas of feelings, and such words are verbs or portions of verbs, such as are adjectives, common nouns, etc. (emphasis added)

While it this brief “disquisition upon the nature of language” is certainly not enough to make Peirce’s thinking about this dualism clear, it does make it clear that Peirce had analyzed language as a function of the same dualism as Lacan used, in much the same way as Lacan, and that Peirce had derived the dualism from an even more fundamental conceptual framework. So even if we were to focus only upon the similarity / contiguity dualism, I find that it helps in trying to understand Lacan’s theory of language if one can see how it evolves logically from the foundation of Peirce’s phenomenological architectonic. That is what I will do below.

But this dualism is not by any means the only point of similarity between Peirce and Lacan. Before we turn to a direct presentation of Lacan’s theory of language in the framework of Peirce’s phenomenology, by way of framing Lacan’s thinking more solidly in the context of Peirce’s thinking, it is worth mentioning some of the other points of similarity that would seem to be a function of the influence of Peirce’s thinking. A second similarity, also a very basic similarity, and one which is obvious to anyone who is familiar with Peirce’s thinking, is the three categories. As John Muller said about Lacan, He may have found in Peirce the source of what he called “my categorical registers of the imaginary, the symbolic, and the real”

It is not that Lacan abandoned the metaphor / metonymy dualism in favor of a trinary system of categories, but that he reframed this dualism, the basic binary architectonic that he got from Saussure and Jakobson, as part of a more comprehensive trinary architectonic, which he reconceptualized in the context of Peirce’s trinary phenomenological architectonic. But one must be careful here in mapping from Peirce’s theory to Lacan’s theory, for there is not a direct one to one correspondence between Peirce’s three categories and Lacan’s three categories. I will explain below exactly how Lacan’s dualism (metaphor and metonymy) and Lacan’s three categories (real, imaginary, and symbolic) fit in Peirce’s framework.
Because the two preceding points of similarity are very general and very basic, if they were the only points of similarity, one might suppose that they were a consequence of independent discoveries. In support of this supposition we must acknowledge the following fact: all normal adults in every culture can count up to three, and yet it would be absurd to suppose that one person discovered how to count up to three and all the other people learned it from him. But in my view it is equally absurd to suppose that this universal ability, the ability to count up to three, is the function of a counting gene, as Chomsky does. I am convinced that monkeys, and dogs, can also count up to three. But in any case, I am sure that both Peirce and Lacan would insist that all people can count up to three, all normal people that is, because one, two, three is inherent in the logic of thought, and language, and thus is the basis of the normal. So this premise, that language is not a function of borrowing or of biology, but rather that language is a function of the intrinsic character of logic, and that logic is a function of truth is another fundamental point of similarity that is shared by both Peirce and Lacan. This one, two, three is the beginning of the evolution of language, to which we will return in a moment.

But first, in order to give more force to the idea that Lacan was influenced by Peirce, let me mention two additional, relatively specific points of similarity as examples of what I see as the influence of Peirce. The fourth example of similarity I will cite is this. I suggest that the way Lacan uses the concept of “the cut” was influenced by the way Peirce used the concept of “the cut” in his logic and his theory of signs. Of course, the idea of the cut was already present as a key concept in Freud’s theory, where it was called “castration.” While this word means something more specific than “cut” in Freud’s thinking, the operative predicate at the core of the word “castrate” is also “cut.” And this is reflected in the etymology of the word: the Proto-Indo-European root of “castration” is “kes” meaning “to cut.” But in the logic of Freud’s theory, castration was just the symbolic cut, the event that causes the trauma that triggers the flight to the symbolic, whereas in Lacan’s reformulation of Freud there are three different types of cuts. So to understand the logic of “the cut” in Lacan’s thinking one must distinguish three different types of cuts, and they correspond to his three categories, the symbolic, the imaginary, and the real. And lo and behold, there are three types of cuts in Peirce’s theory of signs. But, while there is good reason to suspect that Lacan’s thinking about the cut was influenced by Peirce’s thinking about the cut, once again one must bear in mind that the three types of Lacan do not correspond exactly to the three types of Peirce. I will explain how their two systems of cuts are related below.

The fifth example of what I see as the influence of Peirce is the idea that the realization of error is what precipitates the conceptualization of an independent self in the course of the child’s development. In Lacan’s thinking, as explained and exemplified by Clavreul (1993, p. 222), the child’s traumatic discovery of the reality of castration, the trauma, has such a profound effect, not just because of the implications it has in regard to the child’s pursuit of pleasure, but because of the implications this discovery has in regard to the child’s knowledge, and thus in regard to the child’s very survival, for the human child’s survival is very much dependent upon the correctness of his knowledge, particularly as his knowledge of the other bears upon his ability to influence the behavior of the other, upon whom he is totally dependent. So to understand Lacan’s reasoning one must understand that in the child’s mind, pragmatically speaking, the dimensions of pleasure and survival, the sexual and the epistemological, are the same. The currency of pleasure is the currency of survival, thus the currency of the sexual is the currency of knowledge. And, the currency of knowledge is the currency of the sexual. Thus when the child discovers his epistemological error in regard to the sexual, it is a shock to the child’s infantile megalomania, a shock to his belief in his omniscience, his power. This forces the child to a radical reframing of his conceptualization of his epistemological position in the world. So what he discovers, or rather what he thinks he discovers, that is so traumatic is that, whereas he thought he was in paradise, he was in error. But, error upon error, he is unaware of the fact that he had already fled from paradise, from the realm of what Lacan called the real to the realm of the imaginary. So when he thought he was in paradise, he had already slipped into the imaginary type of error, and so this new traumatic discovery, this discovery of a new type of error precipitates the second type of flight from himself, the second type of alienation, symbolic identification, in which he identifies with the other other, the second other, the one who he is led by this discovery of error to suppose has the knowledge that he thinks he lacks. And thus in Lacan’s theory it is error that precipitates the concept of a separate self, an other other, the second other, which is the split subject, the symbolic self. In other words, as Lacan says in the following (1981, 137), the subject is conceived in error, is a creature of error.

It is not simply that the subject is, in a static way, lacking, in error. It is that, in a moving way, in his discourse, he is essentially situated in the dimension of the making a mistake (se tromper).

The similarities between Peirce thinking and Lacan’s thinking in regard to the child’s development of the concept of a separate self to which I want to bring attention here, in addition to the role of the cut, which I have already mentioned, are (1) the seminal role of error, (2) the fact that this genesis frames the development of the self.
as an epistemological development rather than a biological development, and (3) the self is a symbolic object, which is to say, a function of language. I will not try to support my suggestions by explaining Peirce’s thinking here in any detail, but will merely cite a few quotations, which will have to speak for themselves. First I cite the following quote from Feibleman’s very instructive discussion of Peirce’s theory of psychology and epistemology (Feibleman, p. 211):

…error even makes us aware of the existence of the knower as a separate being capable of knowing.

However, I would modify this by saying, not that the awareness of our error makes us aware of the knower, as if he were a prior reality, but rather that the awareness of error induces us to suppose that there is a knower, someone who already knew that this was an error, someone who knew more than we did. And this is the dawning of the third party, the father. Not only that, but to those who are familiar with Lacan, this resonates with Lacan’s framing of the position of the psychoanalyst as “the subject supposed to know.” It is clear from the following quote that this is how Peirce thought of this matter too. The crucial point to note here is that this frames the genesis of the child’s conceptualization of himself as subject as a function of knowledge, as an epistemological being, rather than as a biological being. The following quote conveys a sense of Peirce’s idea that ego and the self as subject develop as a function of error.

5.234 …error appears, and it can be explained only by supposing a self which is fallible.

And let me emphasize once again, it is clear here that Peirce is saying that the self comes into being as a function of error, a breach in knowledge, and not that the self is something there that we come to know. The self is something that we suppose in order to explain our error. The self is an entity that is hypothecated as the locus of error. The following quotes show that Peirce holds that this hypothecated self is in fact a symbolic type of entity, or in other words, a function of language. So for Peirce, and Lacan, a word is a self and a self is a word.

5.314. Without fatiguing the reader by stretching this parallelism too far, it is sufficient to say that there is no element whatever of man's consciousness which has not something corresponding to it in the word; and the reason is obvious. It is that the word or sign which man uses is the man himself. For, as the fact that every thought is a sign, taken in conjunction with the fact that life is a train of thought, proves that man is a sign; so, that every thought is an external sign, proves that man is an external sign. That is to say, the man and the external sign are identical, in the same sense in which the words homo and man are identical. Thus my language is the sum total of myself; for the man is the thought.

6.270. The consciousness of a general idea has a certain “unity of the ego,” in it, which is identical when it passes from one mind to another. It is, therefore, quite analogous to a person; and, indeed, a person is only a particular kind of general idea. Long ago, in the Journal of Speculative Philosophy (Vol. II, p. 156), I pointed out that a person is nothing but a symbol involving a general idea; but my views were, then, too nominalistic to enable me to see that every general idea has the unified living feeling of a person.

7.583...man is a thought, and as thought is a species of symbol, the general answer to the question what is man? is that he is a symbol...

If one wanted to pursue Peirce’s view of the development of self and the subject, in addition to the relevant sections of Feibleman mentioned above, I suggest Colapietro’s Peirce’s Approach to the Self. But we have gone far enough for our present purposes.

I believe this brief discussion of Lacan’s linguistic ancestry is sufficient to provide a general understanding of the context of Lacan’s thinking about language. The context of Lacan’s thinking consists primarily of the thinking of Peirce and Jakobson and Saussure. And as I noted above, Jakobson came to frame his theory of language in the framework of Peirce’s categories, his logic, and his theory of signs. So I will turn now to an explanation of Lacan’s theory of language as it evolves from the thinking of Peirce and Jakobson, beginning from the most primitive foundation of Peirce’s thinking, which is a tripartite matrix of phenomenological categories. Peirce called his tripartite architectonic, with characteristically deceptive simplicity, “my three categories,” a phrase which resonates strikingly with Lacan’s phrase quoted above from “La Troisième,” my categorical registers

2. PEIRCE’S THREE CATEGORIES

Peirce’s three categories are the foundation of his thinking. So any attempt to understand Peirce, or to understand the influence of Peirce on Jakobson or Lacan, must begin with Peirce’s three categories. Therefore, while this is not the place for a comprehensive explanation of Peirce’s categories, it is necessary to at least have a basic understanding of the three categories. Fortunately the idea is very simple and obvious. As simple and obvious as one, two, three. A childish idea. And thus it is a matter of child’s play to understand. And yet, precisely because the
idea is so simple, so childish, many people, especially adults, find it hard to understand. So if one prefers a comprehensive technical explanation, an adult explanation, one can wade into Peirce’s eight volume *Collected Writings*, and the huge collection of his unpublished manuscripts, not to mention the many secondary explanations of his thinking. But here we will have to be satisfied with a simple intuitive sense of Peirce’s categories.

When I say that Peirce’s idea of the three categories is as simple as one, two, three, that is not just an analogy: the categories are one, two, three. What makes it difficult to understand the idea is that we are inclined to look at one, two, three from the civilized adult point of view as the first three numbers — 1, 2, 3. We tend take one, two, three as just three of the infinite number of numbers in the endless sequence of numbers, not significantly different from any other three numbers. The fact that these three numbers happen to be the beginning of the number system is considered to be an incidental characteristic. By contrast with the civilized adult point of view, Peirce is looking at the set [one, two, three] not as mere numbers, but as the first three numbers, and thus as the logic of the beginning. And not just the beginning of the numbers, but the beginning of reckoning, the beginning of categorization, the beginning of conceptualization. So in order to grasp Peirce’s idea of the three categories one must abandon the conventionally prescribed civilized adult point of view, and one must go back to the beginning of thought with an open mind. One must take the simpleminded childish point of view. So before we do anything else, we must take the right point of view.

### 2.1. PEIRCE’S POINT OF VIEW

It is difficult to establish a universe of discourse in ordinary conventional language in which one can talk about Peirce’s point of view because his point of view is non-conventional, even anti-conventional. Indeed, to be precise, his point of view is pre-conventional. And thus, to be precise about the problem, it is not just difficult, but impossible to establish an appropriate universe of discourse in terms of ordinary conventional language.

One must begin from the beginning. Therefore one must frame Peirce’ point of view in terms of pre-conventional language, what I will call “wild language.” And I have never seen a way of beginning at the beginning better than the following way that was set down by the Chinese sage Chuang Tzu more than a thousand years ago.

Now I am going to make a statement here. I don’t know whether it fits into the category of other people’s statements or not. But whether it fits into their category or whether it doesn’t, it obviously fits into some category. So in that respect it is no different from their statements. However, let me try making my statement.

There was a beginning. There was a beginning before that beginning. There was a beginning previous to that beginning before there was the beginning.

There was existence; there had been no existence. There was no existence before the beginning of that no existence. There was no existence previous to the no existence before there was the beginning of the no existence. If suddenly there was non-existence, we do not know whether it was really anything existing, or really not existing. Now I have said what I have said, but I do not know whether what I have said be really anything to the point or not.

Heaven, Earth, and I were produced together, and all things and I are one. Since they are one, can there be speech about them? But since they are spoken of as one, must there not be room for speech? One and Speech are two; two and one are three. Going on from this (in our enumeration), the most skilful reckoner cannot reach (the end of the necessary numbers), and how much less can ordinary people do so! Therefore from non-existence we proceed to existence till we arrive at three; proceeding from existence to existence, to how many should we reach? Let us abjure such procedure, and simply rest here.

It is a remarkable coincidence, if that is what it is, that Chuang Tzu had already described Peirce’s point of view a thousand years before Peirce. And I emphasize that it is not just that Chuang Tzu found it necessary, like Peirce, to go back and begin at the beginning, but that when he went back to the beginning he found the same fundamental conceptual framework that Peirce found and, I am suggesting, that Lacan found. They all found the three categories [one, two, three]. So I will take Chuang Tzu’s dialectic of the beginning as the basis of a dialogical frame of reference in which we can ground Peirce’s point of view.

It is crucial, in setting Peirce’s universe of discourse apart from the currently prevailing conventional universe of discourse, to make it clear that Peirce, like Chuang Tzu, is not putting this idea of the beginning forth as a scientific theory. He is putting the idea forth as a self-evident *a priori* rather than as an *a posteriori*. He puts his three categories forth as logically necessary, on the order of the idea that 2+2=4, rather than on the order of the idea that the earth revolves around the sun or the idea that human beings evolved from apes. Or to put it in other words, the scientific discourse presupposes logic and mathematics. But Peirce does not presuppose the scientific universe of discourse, and he does not presuppose logic and mathematics. He begins from the beginning in order to develop the
very foundations of logic and mathematics. Therefore Peirce is not putting forth a scientific hypothesis. He begins at the beginning of logic and mathematics, prior to the scientific.

This does not mean that Peirce cannot be wrong. The point is that what is at issue in Peirce is in the realm of logic and truth rather than in the realm of physics and facts. So what Peirce is putting forth is a system of logical categories, which he considers to be the logically necessary system of categories.

Calling them “categories” naturally raises the next question: What are they categories of? This is difficult to answer in the conventional universe of discourse because the categories are so basic that they cut across the more superficial conventional categories and because the conventional default assumption in our modern universe of discourse is that everything is grounded in the physical. But Peirce’s categories are not primarily categories of physical things, like animal, vegetable, mineral. Note I am not saying that Peirce’s categories do not apply to physical things, but that they are not primarily physical. In other words, Peirce holds that physics is conceptually downstream from logic. And in the same vein they are not primarily categories of biological things. And they are not primarily categories of psychological things. As I said in the previous paragraph, they are primarily logical and/or mathematical categories.

To put it yet another way, Peirce did not arrive at his idea of a system of categories by studying gravity or frogs or human behavior, but by studying logic. In trying to understand how logic works, Peirce kept finding three types of things over and over again in different dimensions of logic, some of which he lists in the following paragraph, which is an introduction to a discussion of some of the triads which he finds in logic.

6.32 Among the many principles of Logic which find their application in Philosophy, I can here only mention one. Three conceptions are perpetually turning up at every point in every theory of logic, and in the most rounded systems they occur in connection with one another. They are conceptions so very broad and consequently inevitable that they are hard to seize and may be easily overlooked. I call them the conceptions of First, Second, Third. First is the conception of being or existing independent of anything else. Second is the conception of being relative to, the conception of reaction with, something else. Third is the conception of mediation, whereby a first and second are brought into relation.

1.354 The triad in reasoning. 1. Three kinds of signs; as best shown in my last paper in the Am. Jour. Math. 2. Term, proposition, and argument, mentioned in my paper on a new list of categories. 3. Three kinds of argument, deduction, induction, hypothesis, as shown in my paper in Studies in Logic. 4 Also three figures of syllogism, as shown there and in my paper on the Classification of Arguments.

4. Three kinds of terms, absolute, relative, and conjugative, as shown in my first paper on Logic of Relatives. There are various other triads which may be alluded to. The dual divisions of logic result from a false way of looking at things absolutely. Thus, besides affirmative and negative, there are really probable enunciations, which are intermediate. So besides universal and particular there are all sorts of propositions of numerical quantity.

In the course of exploring these various sets of three types of things he discovered that in every case the three types of things are interrelated in the same way, which led him to the realization that these various triads in logic are not independent, but rather are manifestations of the same general underlying three types, or categories. This led him to the realization that this tripartite system of categories or archetypes is the very foundation of logic, reasoning, thought, and thus, what is of most immediate relevance to us, the foundation of language.

Since we are particularly interested in the relation between Peirce’s categories and language I will explain it precisely below, but let me briefly outline in general how Peirce frames the relation between his categories and language before we go on. First, in Peirce’s view what logic deals with is signs, which is the category of phenomena that Peirce called, following Locke, “semiotic.” And for Peirce logic and semiotic are the same thing, as can be seen in the following.

1.444. The term “logic” is unscientifically by me employed in two distinct senses. In its narrower sense, it is the science of the necessary conditions of the attainment of truth. In its broader sense, it is the science of the necessary laws of thought, or, still better (thought always taking place by means of signs), it is general semiotic, treating not merely of truth, but also of the general conditions of signs being signs (which Duns Scotus called grammatica speculativa), also of the laws of the evolution of thought, which since it coincides with the study of the necessary conditions of the transmission of meaning by signs from mind to mind, and from one state of mind to another, ought, for the sake of taking advantage of an old association of terms, he called rhetorica speculativa, but which I content myself with inaccurately calling objective logic, because that conveys the correct idea that it is like Hegel’s logic. (Emphasis added)

Now, language is a system of signs, a subset of the realm of signs (a proper subset because there are signs which are not in language), and therefore language is a function of logic, and logic is a function of Peirce’s three categories.

Returning to the task of framing Peirce’s point of view in regard to logic, if we are to understand Peirce, it is necessary that we be aware that Peirce considers logic to be normative. That is, for Peirce logic is oriented in relation to a standard and it is tendential in relation to that standard. And the standard which logic is oriented in relation to, as he stated in the preceding quote, is truth. And this view of logic is even more clearly explained in his “Critical Analysis of Logical Theories” as demonstrated in the following quotes.

2.52 ...Other authors, indeed, a large majority of logicians, without citing results of scientific psychology in support of the principles of logic, yet incessantly refer to data of psychology—or to what would ordinarily be so considered, apparent self-observations that we think so and so—as showing what the truths of logic are. All this is beside the purpose. Logic is not the science of how we do think;
but, in such sense as it can be said to deal with thinking at all, it only determines how we ought to think; nor how we ought to think in
conformity with usage, but how we ought to think in order to think what is true.

2.125. In the first place, you would not wish to study logic unless you intended to reason; and you doubtless hold the purpose of
reasoning to be the ascertainment of the truth. So it appears that you belong to the sect that maintains that there is such a thing as
truth.

2.358. The view which pragmatic logic takes of the predicate, in consequence of its assuming that the entire purpose of deductive logic
is to ascertain the necessary conditions of the truth of signs

To make his idea of the normative character of logic even more precise, there is good reason, as illustrated by the
following quote, to believe that Peirce conceived of the semiotic realm as kind of gravitational field that is governed
by a kind of gravitational force that is centered upon truth.

8.12 There is, then, to every question a true answer, a final conclusion, to which the opinion of every man is constantly gravitating.

Thus for Peirce the realm of logic, signs, language, and thought, is a gravitational field.

Note that this conception of logic presupposes that there is some other force at work in the semiotic realm,
a secondary force, a contrary force, a force which opposes truth, as a function of which things come to depart from
truth in the first place. That is, if one speaks of things tending toward truth, then one must suppose that things had
previously come to be away from truth. Whatever the origin of this other force might be, in that it is opposed to
truth, it tends toward the false, and thus can be identified as the dynamic that is at work in human psychopathology.
So in the most general point of view the realm of logic, semeiotic, and language, can be seen as a field governed by
the interplay of these two conflicting forces, truth first and at the center and falsity second and tending away from
the center.

Now, it seems to be a somewhat obscure feature of Lacan’s thinking, because it is often misunderstood
and/or ignored, Lacan agrees with Peirce in holding that the human situation is centered upon and framed by truth,
and that psychopathology is a function of falsity. And in as much as this orientation is in radical conflict with the
conventional point of view, in trying to understand Lacan and Peirce it is impossible to overemphasize the
importance of the fact that the thinking of both Lacan and Peirce is centered upon truth, and logic in relation to truth,
and language as it evolves as a function of logic in relation to truth, and the human psyche as it evolves as a function
of language in relation to truth.

So in summary, when we try to understand Peirce’s categories we must take truth, not physical substance,
as the center of our universe of discourse, and we must bear in mind that we are not looking at a system of physics,
but at a system of logic.

In concluding this orientation to Peirce’s point of view, I note that after Peirce discovered and came to
understand the tripartite system of categories in logic, he tried to figure out how the categories worked out in other
realms of phenomena. For example, in an early discussion of these matters in 1.373 through 1.400 he showed how
the categories could be used in trying to makes sense of metaphysics, psychology, physiology, biology, and physics.
So the concluding point I am trying to make here in framing Peirce’s point of view is that Peirce does not derive his
theory of logic from a theory of psychology and his theory of psychology from a theory of biology in accord with
the prevailing conventional mode of thought, but on the contrary, he derives his theory of psychology from his
theory of logic. And thus, contrary to Chomsky, Peirce would not frame linguistics as a branch of psychology,
which would be in turn a branch of physics. Peirce would frame linguistics, and psychology, and physics as
branches of semiotics, or in other words, as branches of logic.

2.2. ONE, TWO, THREE

Peirce describes his system of categories both externally or internally, i.e. either in terms of the
relationships between the categories or in terms of the characteristics that are typical of the phenomena that belong
to each of the three categories. But one must bear in mind that these are not independent points of view: As will
become clear in a moment, the characteristics of each of the three categories of phenomena can be seen as a function
of the external relations among the categories. And the other way around, the external relations can be seen as a
function of the characteristics of the phenomena. So at this primitive level of conceptualization, at the beginning,
relations and characteristics, nouns and verbs, are readily interchangeable.


2.2.1. Relationships Between the Categories

Looking at the categories in terms of relationships, we can describe the system of relationships in two ways. First, in terms of order: One is prior to two is prior to three. Or, second, in terms of set inclusion: A set of three things includes a set of two things (actually three sets of two things) and a set of one thing (three sets of one thing), and a set of two things includes a set of one thing, but not vice versa. So there can be one without two, and two without three. But if there are three then there are also two and one, and if there are two then there is also one. So the categories are asymmetrically related, and this asymmetrical relation can be conceptualized either in terms of order or set inclusion.

These two ways of characterizing the relations among the categories, order or inclusion, are the foundation of, and are conventionally confused with, the concepts of time and space respectively. So in trying to understand the logic of the categories we must struggle against this conventional confusion; we must bear in mind that the categories are not relations of time or space, but rather they are purely logical relations prior to the conceptualization of time and space. But one can easily see how this confusion takes place if one thinks about how the categories work in the process of counting. For example, if you have a set of things and you want to count them, you must start counting with one, and then comes two, and then three. So when we reckon things by counting, the purely logical relations among the categories is played out in the dimension of time. This is only one of the many ways in which the logic of the categories unfolds in the dimension of time. But strictly speaking the relations of order and/or inclusion at the level of the basic categories is purely logical.

I think it might be useful at this point to cite some examples, in addition to those mentioned by Peirce in the quote from 1.354 above, to illustrate some of the myriad ways the tripartite system of categories is manifest in language. A very important example is this: every language has a system of indexical reference, known as a pronoun system, that consists of exactly three types, known as persons, and these three types of persons are traditionally known as first person, second person, and third person pronouns. But I must inject the warning that, despite what appears to be an obvious correlation in the conventional conceptualization of pronouns, the order of personal pronouns does not correlate in a simple one to one way with the order of the categories. One of the anomalies is that, as is well known, children learn the first person pronoun after they learn the first and second person pronouns. The logic of persons very complex, even perversely complex. But complex or not, it is obvious that an adequate theory of language must make sense of the logic of persons. The logic of persons is one of the most important dimensions of language, because it is the machinery by which we calculate our positions and our relationships and thus it is the logic in which we frame our selves in the linguistic universe of discourse. While Peirce’s categories cannot be mapped directly onto the three persons, it does provide a naturally hospitable and language independent logical framework from which to begin to calculate the attribution of persons. As Ketner (1990, p. 2) observes:

*Contemporary formal logic tends to push this factor far into the background, but Peirce makes persons, and the conversation between persons, a basic and explicit aspect of his logic.*

A second example of how the three categories are manifest in language: there are three types of verbs, those which take only one argument, those which take two arguments, and those which take three arguments. And there are three types of arguments, subject, object, and indirect object, in that order. Thus if a verb takes only one argument, such as “fall”, e.g. “Bob fell,” that one argument will be the grammatical subject. This is a universal law of language, a logical necessity. It is logically impossible for a verb to take only an object as argument. And if a verb takes two arguments, such as “hit”, e.g. “Bob hit Bill,” the second will be the object. And the indirect object can only be used as a third argument, as with “give,” e.g. “Bob gave Bill a duck.”

A third example: every language has three types of phonological elements - vowels, consonants, semivowels, in that order. And every language must have at least three vowels. Another: there are three categories of grammatical number - singular, plural, dual, in that order. Another: there are three categories of grammatical time - present, past, and future, in that order. (I will return to this example below.) Another: there are three grammatical genders - masculine, feminine, neuter, in that order. There are three modes of grammatical activity in verbs - active, passive, middle, in that order. There are three types of affixes - suffix, prefix, infix, in that order. One could go on and on. Indeed, the point of Lacan’s theory of language is that everything in language is a function of the three categories. But these few examples will have to suffice to illustrate the categories here.

Perhaps the most important, and at the same time the least known, dimension of Peirce’s thought is the system he developed for representing logical propositions and for performing logical operations. In the currently prevailing conventional universe of discourse it is assumed that logic is a system of algebraic representations following the tradition of logical positivism as epitomized in the work of Bertrand Russell. But as Kenneth Ketner (p. 1-2) explains in the following quote, Peirce found it more useful to follow in the tradition of Euler, and Venn, whose “Venn diagrams” are a commonly used device for explaining set relations.

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Peirce’s diagrammatic logic is another of the many important aspects of Peirce’s thought that we will not have time to explain sufficiently here. But because it is a diagrammatic type of logic, which is to say an iconic type of logic, a concept which we will shortly explain, it is relatively easy to understand, by contrast with the conventionally favored algebraic, or symbolic, type of logic. Therefore, from this point on I will make use of Peirce’s diagrammatic logic to represent propositions and relationships. And I will assume that one can intuitively grasp the logic being so represented. But as the discussion progresses I will explain various specific points of Peirce’s diagrammatic logic that I consider to be particularly pertinent.

Given Peirce’s diagrammatic logic then, I will begin by using it as in Figure 1 to represent the logic of the relationships between the three categories of phenomena. What is represented here are three planes or surfaces which appear to be cut out from and rising from the surface of the paper which this representation is printed upon. Peirce calls these surfaces “sheets of assertion” or “universes of discourse.”

I will make three points about this representation. First, this representation, like all representations, is a misrepresentation. And so it is potentially misleading in many ways, so many ways that it would be impossible to enumerate them all. But I want to mention one particularly pertinent potentially misleading aspect of this representation: It seems to displays three surfaces, but in fact there are four surfaces, four universes of discourse in play here—the three surfaces represented on the paper, which are labeled one, two, and three, and the paper itself. And it is very important to note that only one of these surfaces is real, the paper, and the other three are merely represented as distinct surfaces, and thus are merely imaginary universes of discourse, images of universes of discourse. These three imaginary surfaces look like they are cut out and raised above the real surface of the paper, but there are no real cuts here and nothing is really raised above the surface of the underlying universe of discourse, which here is represented by the paper.

Second, for those who are familiar with Venn diagrams, note that this diagram represents the same relations as would a Venn diagram, namely, set inclusion. That is, as explained above, all threes contain both twos and ones, but not vice versa. Thus there are ones that are not twos or threes. And there are twos that are not threes.

Third, unlike a Venn diagram, Figure 1 also represents the relation of priority. As explained above this relation of priority can be thought of in terms of the relation of implication. “If one, then two”, means that there cannot be a second universe of discourse unless there is a first. Or, to put it the other way around, “a second presupposes a first.”

Before we go on to look at the characteristics of the phenomena that belong to the three categories, I want to emphasize a basic point that I consider to be of the utmost importance about the logic of the relations among the categories. We have seen that the system of categories can be talked about in terms of either order or inclusion. And we have seen the system of categories manifest in other relations in logic and language. But there is one general characteristic that is common among all of the various ways in which this system of relations is manifest, and that is that the relations among the categories are asymmetric.

This is important because of the conjunction of two facts. First, it is commonly assumed in the conventional universe of discourse that the relationships amongst elements in language are symmetric. Under this assumption linguists have assumed, without question, that there is only one kind of opposition, namely, the sort of symmetric opposition known as diadic opposition. But the fact that Peirce’s categories, which he puts forth as the logic of language, are asymmetric obviously implies that the relations of language must be fundamentally asymmetric. The conflict between the common assumption of symmetry by linguists and the prediction of asymmetry that follows from Peirce’s categories gains force when one puts it in the context of the other fact, which is that in spite of and in conflict with their assumption of symmetric opposition, linguists keep bumping against the inconvenient fact that the relations among things in language are in fact asymmetric. There is a large and well known and well documented body of asymmetric facts. This body of facts has been developed under the rubric of “language universals” in terms of the concept of markedness. But for the most part these inconvenient asymmetric facts, which really constitutes the substance of language itself, have been swept under the carpet, repressed, because there is no place for such facts in a universe of symmetrical logic. But here in the asymmetric logic of Peirce’s categories we have the foundation of a universe of discourse which not only allows asymmetric relations, but which demands asymmetric relations. So the
point is that the asymmetry of the relations among the categories that is of paramount importance in regard to the development of an adequate theory of language.

### 2.2.2. Characteristics of the Categories

Let us turn now from looking at the relations between the three categories to looking at the characteristics that are typical of the phenomena that belong to the three categories. To talk about the characteristics of the phenomena that belong to the first, second, and third categories, Peirce coined the abstract nouns “Firstness,” “Secondness,” and “Thirdness.” Following is a definition of these three terms:

8.328 I should define Firstness, Secondness, and Thirdness thus: Firstness is the mode of being of that which is such as it is, positively and without reference to anything else. Secondness is the mode of being of that which is such as it is, with respect to a second but regardless of any third. Thirdness is the mode of being of that which is such as it is, in bringing a second and third into relation to each other.

And in another place,

1.356. The first is that whose being is simply in itself, not referring to anything nor lying behind anything. The second is that which is what it is by force of something to which it is second. The third is that which is what it is owing to things between which it mediates and which it brings into relation to each other.

Note that in these quotes Peirce defines the characteristics of the three types of phenomena as a function of the number of elements involved in the relationship. So in Peirce’s view the typical characteristics of the phenomena in each category is not ad hoc, but is a function of the position of each category in relation to the whole tripartite system. Bearing this in mind, let us look at Peirce’s description of the manifest characteristics of each of the three types of phenomena.

#### 2.2.2.1. Firstness = Chance (tuch), Sponteneity, Freedom

It is necessary here to also bear in mind that, given the progressive inclusiveness of the categories, there are different varieties of firstness. There is the pure firstness of the absolutely first and then there is the somewhat mitigated firstness of secondness and the even more mitigated firstness of thirdness. These are all manifestations of firstness, but pure firstness is not the same as the mixed firstness that is manifest in secondness and thirdness. Of course, Peirce explains and exemplifies these various types of phenomena in great detail (see 3.530). Because of our interest here, we will have occasion to explain one of the mixed types of firstness, namely, the firstness of thirdness, in the discussion of the third category of phenomena, signs, in section The Category of Signs. But here we will cite Peirce talking about the pure firstness of the absolutely first.

Note that the first is prior to language, because language belongs to the third category of phenomena. Thus, as Peirce says in the above quote, it is impossible to describe firstness. One can say things about firstness, but firstness cannot be pinned down or limited by words in any way. Thus, for example, although the first is not divided, it is still misleading to say that the first is one, because to assert that it is one implies that it is not many, which is to imply that it can be defined in relation to something it is not, in which case it would not be the first. Similarly, to assert that the first is a unity implies that the first does not include duality or multiplicity, but one cannot conceive of duality or multiplicity until one gets to the level of thirdness. Thus Peirce says the following about the absolute first:

2.85 Here would be an utter absence of binarity. I cannot call it unity; for even unity supposes plurality. I may call its form Firstness, Orience, or Originality. It would be something which is what it is without reference to anything else within it or without it, regardless of all force and of all reason. Now the world is full of this element of irresponsible, free, Originality.

In this regard Peirce would agree with the post-modern assertion that one cannot speak of “unitary truth,” that there is no One, “il n’y a pas n’Un.” And yet he would hold that there is truth and there is oneness. It is just that you cannot talk about it. In this regard he would agree with the strange seeming insistence of Zen that the one must be characterized as “not-one and not-two.”
Another important aspect of firstness I want to emphasize in connecting Lacan’s thinking to Peirce’s thinking is addressed by Peirce in terms of “tychism.” In Peirce’s phenomenology and logic the tychism of firstness is opposed by the synechism (continuity or lawfulness) of thirdness.

6.201…Tychism, or the doctrine that absolute chance is a factor of the universe.

7.565. The word synechism is the English form of the Greek [synechismos], from [synehés], continuous. For two centuries we have been affixing -ist and -ism to words, in order to note sects which exalt the importance of those elements which the stemwords signify. Thus, materialism is the doctrine that matter is everything, idealism the doctrine that ideas are everything, dualism the philosophy which splits everything in two. In like manner, I have proposed to make synechism mean the tendency to regard everything as continuous.

The root of “tychism” is borrowed from Greek τυχή, Aristotle’s τοῦχη. In the following quotes Peirce talks about Aristotle’s tychism in terms of chance, and explains that he regards it as another way of talking about freedom and spontaneity.

1.403 …Aristotle often lays it down that some things are determined by causes while others happen by chance.

6.201 …when I speak of chance, I only employ a mathematical term to express with accuracy the characteristics of freedom or spontaneity.

Thus, according to Peirce, in that it is the same as freedom and spontaneity, chance, or τοῦχη is also characteristic of firstness.

6.200 …The very first and most fundamental element that we have to assume is a Freedom, or Chance, or Spontaneity.

What does this have to do with Lacan? It has not been the topic of much discussion but chance plays an absolutely fundamental role in Lacan’s thinking, and Freud’s, about psychopathology and semiosis. It is common knowledge that the most salient characteristic of the style of the semiosis of the unconscious is surprise. That is, an unconscious speech act seems to be an accident. It is very important to understand why this is so, and Lacan has spoken to this question in various ways. For example, in his discussion of “Psychoanalysis and cybernetics, or on the nature of Language” in Seminar II Lacan says (p. 296) the following:

Cybernetics, we are told, was born very straightforwardly from the work of engineers concerned with the economics of information, [but]…To understand what cybernetics is about, one must look for its origin in the theme, so crucial for us, of the signification of chance. (emphasis added)

And Peirce’s very word appears (transliterated) in the title of the chapter “Tuché and Automaton,” which is a study of the logic of surprise and repetition, in Seminar XI, published as The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis, though Lacan does not mention Peirce, saying he borrowed the concept from Aristotle (p. 53). But wherever he got it, the function of chance in Lacan’s conceptualization of psychopathology is clear in the following (p. 55):

The function of the τοῦχη, of the real as encounter—the encounter in so far as it may be missed, in so far as it is essentially the missed encounter—first presented itself in the history of psycho-analysis in a form that was in itself already enough to arouse our attention, that of the trauma.

And Lacan says that tychism central to his theory in the following (p. 80):

…for any conception of the psychical development as elucidated by psycho-analysis, the fact of the τυχή is central.

Having thus shown how Lacan’s thinking about chance relates to Peirce’s firstness, let us move on to secondness.

2.2.2.2. Secondness = Brute Force, Conflict, Struggle

The essence of secondness is the logic of division and the dynamic of conflict. There is only one in the beginning, so the second can only come from the first by dividing itself off from the first. And thus by its inherent nature the second tends to gravitate back into the first, so the second can only maintain its separate existence by means of struggle.

1.322. The second category that I find, the next simplest feature common to all that comes before the mind, is the element of struggle.

1.324. [There is a category] which the rough and tumble of life renders most familiarly prominent. We are continually bumping up against hard fact. We expected one thing, or passively took it for granted, and had the image of it in our minds, but experience forces that idea into the background, and compels us to think quite differently. You get this kind of consciousness in some approach to purity when you put your shoulder against a door and try to force it open. You have a sense of resistance and at the same time a sense of effort. There can be no resistance without effort; there can be no effort without resistance. They are only two ways of describing the same experience. It is a double consciousness. We become aware of ourselves in becoming aware of the not-self. The waking state is a consciousness of reaction; and as the consciousness itself is two-sided, so it has also two varieties: namely, action, where our modification of other things is more prominent than their reaction on us, and perception, where their effect on us is overwhelmingly greater than our effect on them. And this notion, of being such as other things make us, is such a prominent part of our life that we...
There are many aspects of secondness here, but we can only focus on two. First, the second emerges as that which struggles against the first, literally the antagonist. This corresponds in Lacan’s theory of the development of the human psyche to what Lacan called the mirror stage, where the first corresponds to what he calls the Other, and the antagonism inherent in secondness is what Lacan called “aggressivity.” Also note that we see force emerging here as the dynamic of struggle. This force is manifest on the physical level as things bumping into each other at the level of secondness. This brute force at the level of secondness is what the science of physics tries to make sense of. But this force of secondness is also manifest on the level of thirdness, the mental level, as the force that Freud called “libido” and is eventually transformed into a type of thirdness that Freud called the “drives,” Lacan’s “desire.” As we will see below, the level of secondness, the level of brute force and brute being, the level of conflict played out in the logic of opposition, is what Lacan calls “the real.” The reader who is familiar with Lacan will recognize numerous familiar points in the following:

1.358. Just as the first is not absolutely first if thought along with a second, so likewise to think the second in its perfection we must banish every third. The second is therefore the absolute last. But we need not, and must not, banish the idea of the first from the second; on the contrary, the second is precisely that which cannot be without the first. It meets us in such facts as another, relation, compulsion, effect, dependence, independence, negation, occurrence, reality, result. A thing cannot be other, negative, or independent, without a first to or of which it shall be other, negative, or independent. Still, this is not a very deep kind of secondness; for the first might in these cases be destroyed yet leave the real character of the second absolutely unchanged. When the second suffers some change from the action of the first, and is dependent upon it, the secondness is more genuine. But the dependence must not go so far that the second is a mere accident or incident of the first; otherwise the secondness again degenerates. The genuine second suffers and yet resists, like dead matter, whose existence consists in its inertia. Note, too, that for the second to have the finality that we have seen belongs to it, it must be determined by the first immovably, and thenceforth be fixed; so that unalterable fixity becomes one of its attributes. We find secondness in occurrence, because an occurrence is something whose existence consists in our knocking up against it. A hard fact is of the same sort; that is to say, it is something which is there, and which I cannot think away, but am forced to acknowledge as an object or second beside myself, the subject or number one, and which forms material for the exercise of my will. (Emphasis added)

2.2.2.2.1. There are Two Types of Negation

The above quote offers us the opportunity to clarify a point of logic that has caused no end of confusion, so we might as well take a moment to clarify it. I have emphasized the words “negative” and “negation” in the above paragraph in order to draw attention to the fact that Peirce is saying here that negation is function of secondness. But the fact is that there is also another type of negation that is a function of the logic of thirdness. There are two types of negation, and these correspond to the two types of language I will distinguish below. Needless to say, there is no negation at the level of firstness. The problem is that people commonly mix the two types of negation together as if they belonged to the same category, and so people commonly have a confused idea of the logic of negation.

The type of negation that is a function of thirdness is only found in language proper and is implemented by means of a symbol of negation, such as a word or a prefix or a suffix. In English we have the negative words “no” and “not,” and we have various negative prefixes “un-”, “in-”, “dis-”, “mis-”, etc. What is more, I will try to make it clear below that language arises as a function of the symbolic type of negation; The symbol of negation is the first symbol, the symbol that engenders the dimension of the symbolic, the symbol that generates all other symbols. Thus the third type of negation is not just a function of language; it is the archetype and generator of language.

The type of negation that is a function of secondness is different. Secondness is a kind of negation, but it is not implemented by means of a symbol. Secondness arises by opposition from firstness. But there is no negative element as such at the level of secondness. There is no negative element in nature. There could be no negative thing. A thing is just a thing. A thing just is what it is. So what Peirce is talking about as negative in the above description of secondness is the second type of negation which is not a function of a word but is a function of a kind of positive behavior of some sort that manifests opposition or resistance. (Note that this type of negation is not represented but is manifest.) Perhaps the most literal example of the second type of negation is the implementation of opposition by pushing or pulling. But one can easily see many other examples of the second type of negation in the behavior of animals or young children, or adults for that matter. For example babies reject food by spitting the food out. Or by turning their head away from offered food. Two or three year old children sometimes manifest refusal simply by collapsing down to the floor. These are examples of the second type of negation, and must not be confused with the third type of negation.
Lacan also talks about the two types of negation in terms of “the distinction to be drawn between negativism and negation” in Seminar I (p. 83) and in many other places.

2.2.2.3. Thirdness = Mediation, Substitution, Sacrifice

As we saw in the quote from 1.356 cited above, the relevant part of which I repeat below, the third type of phenomena mediates between two other things and has the character that is has as a function of the things it mediates between.

1.356. The third is that which is what it is owing to things between which it mediates and which it brings into relation to each other.

And as Peirce states in the following, the quintessential mode of mediation is representation.

5.104. Now Thirdness is nothing but the character of an object which embodies Betweenness or Mediation in its simplest and most rudimentary form; and I use it as the name of that element of the phenomenon which is predominant wherever Mediation is predominant, and which reaches its fullness in Representation.

5.105. Thirdness, as I use the term, is only a synonym for Representation, to which I prefer the less colored term because its suggestions are not so narrow and special as those of the word Representation.

8.332 A Third is something which brings a First into relation to a Second. A sign is a sort of Third.

In its genuine form Thirdness is the triadic relation existing between a sign, its object, and the interpreting thought, itself a sign, considered as constituting the mode of a sign. (Hardwick, p. 31)

So all signs belong to the third category of phenomena, but note that there are phenomena of the third category that are not signs. As Peirce said in the quote cited above (5.104), “Mediation …reaches its fullness in Representation,” but there are examples of mediation that are less than full, which Peirce calls “degenerate” thirds. For example the center of a circle mediates between a pair of diametrically opposed points on a circle, but the center does not represent the points, nor does it represent the circle; the center is not a sign. The degenerate types of thirds are important, but not of central importance here, so we will not discuss them further.

Thus the category of signs is a proper subset of the third category of phenomena. And language is a proper subset of the realm of signs. So with these categorizations and sub-categorizations of phenomena in mind, we will proceed to develop an understanding of Lacan’s theory of language by focusing on The Category of Signs in section 3 below. But before we do, I would like to make two contextual connections in regard to the three categories.

2.3. TIME, TIMES, AND THE DIVIDING OF TIME

The conventional view is that time goes from the past through the present into the future. Thus, if we were to begin from the conventional point of view and try to associate the three logical categories with the three categories of time, we would say that the past is first, the present is second, and the future is third.

But, if we go back to the beginning, prior to the conventional, and look at the logic of time anew from the purely logical point of view of the three categories, this is not the way it works out. As Peirce makes clear in the following quotes, if one looks at time from the point of view of the logic of the categories, the present is first, the past is second, and the third is future.

1.343... We may say that the bulk of what is actually done consists of Secondness -- or better, Secondness is the predominant character of what has been done. The immediate present, could we seize it, would have no character but its Firstness.

8.329 The idea of the present instant, which, whether it exists or not, is naturally thought as a point of time in which no thought can take place or any detail be separated, is an idea of Firstness.

1.343 For this reason I call this element of the phenomenon or object of thought the element of Thirdness. It is that which is what it is by virtue of imparting a quality to reactions in the future.

This makes it clear that there is a conflict between the conventional conceptualization of the categories of time and the purely logical conceptualization of the categories of time. The two points of view agree in making the future third, but are in conflict as to the priority of the present and the past. In as much as time is a deep and pervasive parameter of our worldview, and thus of our lives, this is a striking example of the fact that there is often, if not always, a radical conflict between the purely logical conceptualization of things and the conventional conceptualization of things.

It is important to be aware of this conflict between the conventional point of view and the purely logical point of view, not just for the purpose of understanding the logic of time in particular, but also for the more general purpose of being prepared to expect systematic conflict between the logic of Peirce’s categories and convention.

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But what is more, this particular dimension of conflict is also important to bear in mind here because it has fairly obvious implications for the theory of language. A theory of language based on the conventional view of time predicts that the past is conceptually prior to the present, whereas Peirce predicts that the present is conceptually prior to the past. And the facts of language are clearly inconsistent with the conventional prediction and are consistent with Peirce’s purely logical prediction. These are not arcane or controversial facts. It is plain on the very surface of every language in terms of the logic of markedness that the present is unmarked and the past is marked, and therefore that the present is conceptually prior to the past. In English, for example, the present is “I look” and the past “I looked” is derived from the present form by adding the suffix “-ed.” The conceptual priority that is manifest as formal simplicity is also manifest in the fact that children learn the present tense before the past tense.

And there are many other ways in which the conceptual priority of the present is manifest in language. 24

Anticipating developments, it might be helpful to point out that this implies that in trying to understand the human mind and/or psychopathology in terms of Lacan’s categories, the real is anchored in the present, the imaginary is in the past, and the symbolic is in the future.

2.4. THE TRIKAYA

Recalling that this discussion of Peirce’s three categories began with Chuang Tzu’s dialectic on his three categories, which seem to be the same as Peirce’s three categories, it seems appropriate to end the discussion by mentioning the Buddhist doctrine of Trikaya, which also seems to be the same three categories.

The Buddhist Trikaya (Sanskrit tri- is cognate with English “three” and kaya means “bodies” in Sanskrit) is a way of characterizing phenomena in terms of three categories of being, or three types of bodies. The three types of bodies are ordered, and progressively inclusive, like Peirce’s one, two, three, but they are not usually talked about in terms of order. As described for example in Trungpa (1985 p. 106-108), the first of the Trikaya is dharmakaya (translated by Trungpa as “body of truth”). Trungpa describes the dharmakaya using some of the same words as Peirce: “truth,” “the original state of being,” and

the state of complete freedom...so free that the question of freedom does not even apply.

The second body is sambhogakaya (“body of joy”) which Trungpa describes as “energy” and “emotions.” The idea of “energy” resonates with Peirce’s “brute force.” And, of course, “joy” and “energy” recall Freud’s libido and Lacan’s jouissance.

And the third of the Trikaya is nirmanakaya (“body of emanation”) which Trungpa describes as “manifestation” and “communication”, obviously the same as Peirce’s category of signs.

I am not, of course, suggesting that Peirce borrowed the idea of three categories from Buddhism or from Taoism. There is no evidence to my knowledge that Peirce was especially familiar with either school of thought. On the contrary, there is some evidence that he had a shallow and profoundly mistaken idea of Buddhism (1.673, 3.415, and 6.426). And so far as I am aware he makes no mention of Taoism. He seems to have been entirely unaware of the fact that his three categories had been independently discovered, at least twice, long ago and far away.

3. THE CATEGORY OF SIGNS

Now we have a basic understanding of Peirce’s three-category phenomenology. When we consider how language fits into this system, it is clear that it belongs to the third category of phenomena. As we have seen the third category of phenomena is mediation, which is preeminently manifest in representations, or signs. And obviously language is a system of signs. So in developing an understanding of Lacan’s theory of language on the basis of Peirce’s phenomenology and logic, the next step is to frame the category of signs within the third category of phenomena.

3.1. FRAMING THE CATEGORY OF SIGNS

I will begin by pointing out two general boundaries of the category of signs that might not be obvious from the foregoing. First, it is probably not too important here, but to avoid possible confusion in future, it should be
made clear that the category of signs is a proper subset of the third category of phenomena. That is, all signs belong to the third category, but not all phenomena that belong to the third category are signs; there are phenomena that belong to the third category that are not signs. Recall that the third category includes things that mediate between two other things. As Peirce points out (1.367),

\[ \text{Philadelphia lies between New York and Washington. Such thirds may be called intermediate thirds or thirds of comparison.} \]

So Philadelphia belongs to the third category of phenomena in the sense that it is physically between the other two cities. But Philadelphia is not a sign of either New York or Washington by virtue of this relationship. So this is an example of a relation of the third type that we exclude when we focus on the category of signs.

Second, when we focus on the category of signs, we exclude some, but not all, phenomena that belong to the first and the second categories. This is so because the relation between the categories is evolutionary: the third type of phenomena grows from phenomena of the second and first types. By way of analogy, just as an animate life includes the evolutionarily more primitive vegetative and chemical processes, so a sign includes secondness and firstness. And there are vegetative and chemical processes that are not involved in animate life.

Now let me frame the category of signs in relation to some relevant words and concepts. First, as I pointed out in the discussion above, Peirce uses the word “semeiotics” to refer to the realm of signs, and he also uses the same word, ambiguously, to refer to the science that studies the category of signs. Also recall that for Peirce “logic” is the same as “semeiotics.” And note that sometimes the variant spellings “semiotic” or “semiotics” is used instead of “semeiotic.”

Second, I would hope that by this stage in the development of Peirce’s theory it is clear that semiotics is a categorically distinct realm of phenomena and a categorically distinct system of study from physics. Semiotics is the science of signs, the third type of phenomena, whereas physics is the science of physical things, the second type of phenomena. However, both disciplines of study use signs as their means of study. Both a semioticist, to coin a word, and a physicist perceive phenomena by means of signs, and both use signs to think and formulate theories, and both use signs to communicate their thoughts and theories. To put it another way, any theory, whether it is a theory of physics or biology or semiotics, is a semiotic phenomenon, not a physical phenomenon. Further, as a matter of fact the theoretical cognitions of both semiotics and physics have been almost exclusively limited to the symbolic types of signs to the exclusion of the more primitive iconic and indexical signs. (Below I will explain the distinction between iconic, indexical, and symbolic types of signs.) Peirce is one of the rare exceptions, as we will see.

One of the important implications that can be drawn from the foregoing observations is that the science of physics is conceptually downstream from the science of semiotics. This is important because it is contrary to the conventional world view, which holds that physics is the most basic point of view.

There is another way of framing the study of phenomena as a function of Peirce’s categories. Instead of looking at categories of phenomena in the abstract, one can look at the categories as of modes of interaction, as modes of praxis, as pragmatic modes. In terms of praxis we can distinguish between strategic interaction as the mode of behavior of firstness, tactics as the mode of behavior of secondness, and games as the mode of behavior of thirdness. Of course, these modes of behavior are related as are the categories, so that there are both tactics and strategy in games, and there is strategy in tactics. But there is not necessarily any game like aspect in tactics, nor in strategy. And there is not necessarily any tactics in strategy. Pure strategy is purely a question of position, or point of view. Tactics involves going someplace and/or doing something. Games add the requirement to obey rules. So the type of interaction known as “war” corresponds to the categories of firstness and secondness as distinct from politics, which corresponds to the category of thirdness. There are semiotic interactions that are game-like, such as politics, and there are semiotic interactions that are not game-like, such as love and war. Thus we say “All is fair in love and war.” In other words, there are semiotic interactions that are wild and semiotic interactions that are civilized. So if we can once again anticipate the typology of signs which I will explain below, a game can be described as a mode of interaction that is governed by the logic of symbolic signs, whereas tactics and strategy are not necessarily governed by any signs. Thus one can frame a typology of modes of praxis corresponding to Peirce’s typology of categories of phenomena as represented in Figure 2.

Another important terminological reference point in framing the category of signs is this. The category of signs corresponds to what is commonly called “mind.” In other words, the realm of mind is the realm of semiosis. And, as is obvious from the above discussion, the second category of phenomena is what is commonly called the

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*Figure 2 A Typology of the Three Modes of Praxis*

![Figure 2 A Typology of the Three Modes of Praxis](image)

*Game Theory*

*Tactics*

*Strategies*
“physical” or the “material.” Of course, given the progressive inclusiveness of the categories, mind, as the realm of signs, excludes some of the physical but not every aspect of the physical. For one thing, a sign is incorporated in the physical. That is, all signs must be embodied in some material substance. Indeed, it would seem that the material embodiment of signs is precisely what is meant by the word “substance.” That is, a sign has a stance, a standing, as a phenomenon of the third type, and it also has standing as a phenomenon of the second type, the latter standing under (as the sub-stance of) the former. On the other hand, the physical is governed and controlled to some extent by the semiotic, at least on the level of living beings. In other words, the biology and chemistry of animate beings is to some extent influenced by semiosis. Thus a hierarchy of dominance, in accord with the general principle that the prior governs the subsequent, begins to become evident: Strategy dominates both tactics and games, and tactics dominates games.

Finally let me emphasize again that our focus on the realm of signs as a subset of the category of thirdness is by no means intended to imply that we can exclude the logic or the dynamics of firstness and secondness from consideration. It is just that we can not eat the whole thing at once. We have exclude something when we focus on anything. Here we will foreground thirdness, and thus put firstness and secondness out of our immediate awareness, but we do not thereby exterminate them from the realm of thirdness, even though that is the common practice.

3.1.1. Definition of a Sign

A sign is a relationship among three things, a trinary relationship. The three elements in relationship are the sign itself, the object to which the sign refers, and the interpretant, which is the effect the sign has in the mind of the interpreter of the sign. Following are two different definitions given by Peirce.

2.228. A sign, or representamen, is something which stands to somebody for something in some respect or capacity. It addresses somebody, that is, creates in the mind of that person an equivalent sign, or perhaps a more developed sign. That sign which it creates I call the interpretant of the first sign. The sign stands for something, its object.

2.274. A Sign, or Representamen, is a First which stands in such a genuine triadic relation to a Second, called its Object, as to be capable of determining a Third, called its Interpretant, to assume the same triadic relation to its Object in which it stands itself to the same Object.

If one contemplates these definitions, while the basic idea may be clear, it also becomes clear that the sign is a complex and confusing thing. I will illustrate how confusing the realm of sign is in two ways.

First, consider the following line of reasoning. Peirce defines a sign thus: a sign creates an effect of an object in the mind of a person. I put this definition in the first line of Table 3 below. Now, he calls the effect that a sign creates an interpretant, and he says that an interpretant is also a sign. Also, as we saw above, Peirce considers mind to be the realm of signs. That is, mind is the set of all signs. Also, as we explained above, for Peirce (and Lacan) a person is a sign, or a set of signs. And what is more, as can be seen in the next quote below (1.339), for Peirce “the object of a representation can be nothing but a representation,” which is to say, the object is a sign. Now, starting with the definition of a sign which I gave at the beginning of this paragraph by the process of the substitution of equivalents we can derive the apparently nonsensical definition shown in the second line of Table 3 below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 3 Definitions of a Sign</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A sign creates an effect of an object in the mind of a person</td>
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<tr>
<td>A sign creates a sign of a sign in the set of signs of a set of signs</td>
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While this definition certainly appears to be nonsensical, even bewildering, it is an accurate characterization of the logic of the sign, which is the logic of mind, and the logic of person. That this nonsensical and bewildering idea of the sign is really consistent with Peirce’s thinking can be seen in the following quote.

1.339. A sign stands for something to the idea which it produces, or modifies. Or, it is a vehicle conveying into the mind something from without. That for which it stands is called its object; that which it conveys, its meaning; and the idea to which it gives rise, its interpretant. The object of representation can be nothing but a representation of which the first representation is the interpretant. But an endless series of representations, each representing the one behind it, may be conceived to have an absolute object at its limit. The meaning of a representation can be nothing but a representation. In fact, it is nothing but the representation itself conceived as stripped of irrelevant clothing. But this clothing never can be completely stripped off; it is only changed for something more diaphanous. So there is an infinite regression here. Finally, the interpretant is nothing but another representation to which the torch of truth is handed along; and as representation, it has its interpretant again. Lo, another infinite series!

So the idea that the realm of signs is confusing is not foreign to Peirce. And he does not shy away from the fact that the realm of signs is a bewildering nest of paradoxes, preferring instead to try to make sense of the paradoxes. For
example, if the object of a sign is another sign, then it would appear that signs do not refer to anything in reality. If so, how can logic be oriented, as Peirce says it is, in relation to truth? Peirce sorts this out by pointing out that there is a distinction between the dynamic object and the immediate object (see 8.314). The dynamic object is the real thing, the thing which cannot actually be conveyed by a sign (to convey a real thing requires a truck), but can only be referred to by a sign. Thus in order to know what the dynamic object is, the real object of a sign, one must have prior collateral experience of the object. By contrast, the immediate object is merely an aspect of the real object, such as an image of the object (icon), or a bit of hair from the object (index), which is taken as a sign of the object.

Here is another nest of paradoxes that Peirce explains. We commonly suppose that mind is something that is in a person, but the definition in Table 3 says that a person is a set of signs, which is a subset of the realm of mind, which is the set of all signs, so it implies that mind something that a person is in. Do signs generate persons or do persons generate signs? Is there any such thing as a person or a mind apart from signs? If not, then how can Peirce say that a sign produces an interpretant in the mind of a person? In direct conflict with the conventional way of looking at these phenomena, i.e. mind is a part of a person and signs are produced in the mind of a person, Peirce clearly states in a footnote to 5.289:

Accordingly, just as we say that a body is in motion, and not that motion is in a body we ought to say that we are in thought and not that thoughts are in us.

And in the course of a lengthy discussion in which he tries to sort out these paradoxes, he says:

5.314...the word or sign which man uses is the man himself. For, as the fact that every thought is a sign, taken in conjunction with the fact that life is a train of thought, proves that man is a sign; so, that every thought is an external sign, proves that man is an external sign. That is to say, the man and the external sign are identical, in the same sense in which the words homo and man are identical. Thus my language is the sum total of myself; for the man is the thought. (emphasis added)

And again in a later discussion:

7.583. We have already seen that every state of consciousness [is] an inference; so that life is but a sequence of inferences or a train of thought. At any instant then man is a thought, and as thought is a species of symbol, the general answer to the question what is man? is that he is a symbol.

When we ask what symbol is he, the answer would seem to be that man is the subject of his own thought, so man is the subject, the “I”. And since a subject is an element of grammar, a pronoun, a symbol, is this not precisely what Lacan means when he says the following (Seminar III, p. 243)?

man is the subject captured and tortured by language

Finally, let me conclude this discussion of the definition of the sign by making the a general point: as we have already seen, as soon as one enters into the realm of signs one immediately confronts the very important fact, the ubiquitous fact, that the realm of signs is bewildering. And the realm of signs is bewildering because, as I will explain below, signs are intrinsically duplicitous. And, if signs are bewildering, it is no wonder that the normal human situation is, as Lacan teaches us, characterized by confusion, mental suffering, psychopathy.

So in facing and trying to sort out the bewildering nature of signs, we are facing and sorting out the roots of human psychopathology. Therefore, while it would be easier in some ways to overlook the bewildering parts of the realm of signs, as conventional linguistics does, in doing so we would not only be overlooking the essence of language, but we would also be overlooking the dynamic of human suffering. Therefore, let us cut to the root of the sign.

3.2. THE CUT

The cut is the basic predicate in Peirce’s logic and his theory of signs. The cut is also a fundamental concept in Lacan’s theory. First we will see how the cut works in Peirce’s logic and then we will see how it works in Peirce’s theory of signs.

3.2.1. The Cut in Peirce’s Diagrammatic Logic

There are two basic concepts in Peirce’s diagrammatic logic. The first concept in Peirce’s logic is that of the “sheet of assertion,” and a sheet of assertion is what is commonly called a “universe of discourse.” But we must take care because these two concepts are not quite the same. Peirce sorts them out in the following:

4.396. It is agreed that a certain sheet, or blackboard, shall, under the name of The Sheet of Assertion, be considered as representing the universe of discourse, and as asserting whatever is taken for granted between the graphist and the interpreter to be true of that universe.
For example, the sheet of paper on which these words are written is a sheet of assertion. Note carefully that such a sheet of assertions is not the universe of discourse, but represents the universe of discourse. In other words, the sheet of assertions is a sign of a universe of discourse. And the universe of discourse, the first universe of discourse, indeed the only universe of discourse, is truth.

4.435 ...when we talk logic...our universe is that universe which embraces all others, namely The Truth… (emphasis in original)

And remember that for Peirce logic is semiotic, and semiotic is the realm of signs. Thus any sign, such as a word or sentence, inscribed on a sheet of assertion is to be taken as an assertion, and absent any indication to the contrary, any assertion is to be taken as a true assertion. I should also state explicitly, what was implied in the last sentence, that the inscription of signs on a sheet of assertion is the way a speech act is represented in Peirce’s diagrammatic logic. So a sentence “P” inscribed on a sheet of assertion should be read thus: “It is true that P.”

The second concept in Peirce’s diagrammatic logic is that of the cut.

4.399…By a Cut shall be understood to mean a self-returning linear separation (naturally represented by a fine-drawn or peculiarly colored line) which severs all that it encloses from the sheet of assertion on which it stands itself, or from any other area on which it stands itself.

To put it in more ordinary language, a cut is an enclosed geometric figure, such as a circle or a rectangle. There may be several cuts in a single diagram. Cuts may not intersect one another, but they may "nest" as represented in Figure 3. The line comprising each rectangle represents a cut in the prior sheet of assertion on which it is inscribed, and can be taken as deriving a subsequent sheet of assertion. Thus in Figure 3, the sheet of assertion on which I have inscribed the word “One” is cut out of the sheet of assertion named “Zero” (which is represented by the paper on which this is printed), by the cut labeled “1.” And the sheet of assertion named “Two” is cut out of the sheet of assertion named “One” by the cut labeled “2.” Etc.

The logical force of the cut is akin to that of the negative in symbolic logic, but, as I have already explained in 2.2.2.2.1 Peirce’s theory leads us to distinguish two different types of negativity. We cannot go into this very far here, but it may preclude confusion if I suggest that for the time being we regard the cut as ambiguous as between the two types of negativity. We cannot ignore the negative force of the cut because it plays a pivotal role in the logic of signs because it is by virtue of this negativity that the cut gives rise to the duplicity of the semiotic situation, and of language, as I will explain below.

In the meantime, it is important to point out that the cut also functions in Peirce’s logic much as the predicate of implication does in symbolic logic. That is, in terms of Figure 3, One implies Two, so you can have Two, only if you already have One, but you can have One without having to have Two.

We cannot go deeply into this either, but the implicational force of the cut is important for the theory of language because it provides the framework for the implicational logic of markedness. And it is as a consequence of the implicational nature of the cut that, as linguists have discovered, language universals can only be formulated in terms of the relation of implication. Let me illustrate in terms of a specific example.

A particular mark functions as a sign, which is to say, it has the significance, the value that it has because it is a mark in a particular prior sheet of assertion. That is, a cut, which is a mark, in itself is a sign of nothing but subsequence. And, in that subsequence is a two place predicate, a cut, or a mark, taken by itself is incomplete and incoherent. So in order to understand the significance of a cut, a mark, one must know in what prior sheet of assertion the cut is cut. Thus the significance of a mark, of a cut, is a function of the prior.

For example the following is a well known and well established universal law of markedness in phonology: In general terms, if [affricate], then [stop]. In more specific terms, for example, if [f], then [p]. Or, in other words, no language can have a labial affricate [f] unless it has the corresponding labial stop [p]. Or, another way to put it, a language must first have [p], then it can have [f].

This law of markedness has consequences in all dimensions of language. For example, in terms of possible languages: there are languages that have both [p] and [f], such as English, and there are languages that have [p] but not [f], such as Tagalog, but there are no languages that have [f] but not [p]. And in languages that have both children learn [p] before [f], and they sometimes mistakenly say [p] instead of [f], but not vice versa. Another example: I mentioned above the language universal that the past is subsequent to the present, and this is manifest in the form of language in the fact that the past form of verbs, as in English, is marked by adding a suffix to the present

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**Figure 3 The Cut**

```
     3
    →  Three

     2
    →  Two

     1
    →  One

    Zero
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These few examples will have to suffice to illustrate how the implicational logic of the cut is manifest in the markedness of language.

Let me briefly explain how negativity is related to implication in the logic of the cut in the framework of Peirce’s diagrammatic logic. And note that this also explains how the duplicity of language, which I will explain in a moment, is related to the logic of markedness in language. As I pointed out above, if a proposition “P” is inscribed on the first sheet of assertion means “It is true that P,” as represented on the left in Figure 4. But if the assertion “P” is enclosed in a cut, it means “It is not true that P,” as represented on the right in Figure 4. And if we take both parts of Figure 4 together, it means “P and not P,” which is a contradiction, and which just happens to be the paradoxical logical position in which the poor black cat, which I will discuss in a moment, finds itself. And it is the situation of anything else that is taken as a sign. Including the normal human being.

Now, if we change the right P to Q, the two parts of Figure 4 would mean “P is true and Q is false.” And if we put a cut around both parts of Figure 4 we derive Figure 5, which means “It is not true that [P is true and Q is false].” And those who are familiar with the basics of logic will recognize that this proposition has the same the truth value as the proposition “If P, then Q,” which is to say that Figure 5 represents the relation of implication between P and Q. Thus the cut, which is basically negative, also represents the relation of implication.

Before we go on, this context affords the opportunity to make a point that I have made before and I will make again, because it is a very important point: Note that the first sheet of assertion is different from all subsequent sheets of assertion. The first sheet of assertion is real, the subsequent sheets of assertion are merely represented. The sheet of paper on which these words are represented is real. But the subsequent sheets of assertion, such as the ones named One, Two, and Three in Figure 3 are merely represented as separate sheets of assertion by the signs (the lines) of the corresponding cuts. There is only one real sheet of assertion. And it represents the first universe of discourse, which is truth. All subsequent sheets of assertion are merely plays upon the first sheet of assertion. And as plays on truth these subsequent sheets of assertion represent universes of discourse that are in the registers of pretend, or fantasy, or imagination, or hallucination, or mythology, etc., which is to say, in the register of falsity.

Related to this point, I labeled the first universe of discourse with the name “Zero” in Figure 3 but in ordinary language we do not name the first universe of discourse. Indeed, as Peirce said, it is impossible to name the absolute first. And when we represent the second sheet of assertion, we presuppose the first. Thus when we count we begin with “one” and not with “zero.” However, even though we do not normally name the first universe of discourse, and even though we are not normally aware of the first universe of discourse, in order to represent anything there must always be a first universe of discourse that is not represented in order to have a surface on which to represent. In other words, at the bottom of every representation there must be something which is not represented. Thus the first first, truth, cannot be cut and cannot be represented. Which another way of saying what Piece said in quotes cited above, that the first cannot be named.

There is, of course, a paradox here, the mother of all paradoxes: If the first cannot be cut, then how can there be a second? When this paradox is manifest in practical problems it is manifest as the fundamental human dilemma. It is the fundamental strategic issue. So the way one tries to get out of this dilemma is what determines the path one takes in trying to address the problem of human confusion and human suffering. I will not speak directly to the strategic question here, but as I see it, the fact that all signs are duplicitous, which I will discuss in a moment, is the key. This leads one to the conclusion that, in the words of the ninth century patriarch of Zen Buddhism in China, Huang Po, known as Obaku, founder of the Rinzai school, in Japan (Blofeld, p. 71):

*Anything possessing any signs is illusory. It is by perceiving that all signs are no signs that you perceive the Tathagata.*
And it is particularly relevant in the context of this discussion of the cut to cite Huang Po’s characterization of perception and cognition (Blofeld, p. 123–4), which are of course sign functions:

*By allowing your gaze to linger on a form, you wrench out the eyes of a sage (yourself). And when you linger upon a sound, you slice off the ears of a sage - thus it is with all your senses and with cognition, for their varied perceptions are called slicers.*

There are many other important details about these two basic logical concepts – the sheet of assertion and the cut – that I have left out, but this is enough for present purposes. Just these two concepts alone provide a powerful means of representing the logic of signs and language. The equivalent of the propositional calculus in Peirce’s graphic logic consists of just these two basic concepts, together with seven rules of inference, which I will not go into here. I will use these basic concepts of Peirce’s diagrammatic logic, as I have been doing, to represent the logic of the theory of signs and the theory of language.

### 3.2.2. The Cut in Peirce’s Theory of Signs

Now let us look at how the cut functions in Peirce’s theory of signs. The cut is the primitive predicate in the realm of signs. That is, the cut is the conceptual operation by which something is taken as a sign. In other words, all signs are generated by the cut.

To see how the cut generates a sign let us look into the ontogeny and ontology of the sign. In order to function as a sign, a sign must be perceived. And in order to be perceived, a sign must be embodied in some real concrete physical thing or substance. So we can begin to trace the evolution of a sign from the level of concrete being, which is the level of secondness in Peirce’s categories. So taking this point as the beginning of our reckoning, we can say that in the beginning, a thing is just a thing. It has its own nature and minds its own business. If the rain falls and loosens a rock and the rock rolls down and strikes another rock, there is no sign. A thing only becomes a sign, secondarily, as a result of being taken as a sign by some third party, an observer. Or, in other words, it is only when a thing creates the effect of an object, which effect Peirce calls an “interpretant”, in the mind of a third party that the thing becomes a sign. For example, if a man hears the rock strike the other rock, he may wonder if that sound is a sign that there was some person or some animal uphill from the tree who had dislodged the rock and caused it to roll down. Thus it is as a function of a third party that the thing, in this case a sound, can rise to the level of being a sign.

I should add as a condition on the claim that a sign must be perceived, that a sign can also be imagined, or hallucinated. One can also pretend to perceive a sign. However, these semiotic processes are derivative of real perception, and thus the fact that they are also possible modes of semiosis does not invalidate the above line of reasoning. Nevertheless, because there are such derivative modes of semiosis, because there are imaginary and possible semiotic worlds, any thing and every thing, real or imaginary, even the unimaginable, even nothing, can be taken as a sign. So although all signs must ultimately be grounded in something real, everything is exposed to the risks of being taken as a sign.

And I do not say “exposed to the risk” as a mere figure of speech, as mere metaphor. There is real risk in a thing being taken as a sign. Lacan, as usual, put it in what appears at first sight to be hyperbola, if not just plain false, but which turns out, after some reflection, to be no more than the plain truth. In Lacan’s words,

*le mot est la meurtre de la chose,*

an assertion which he intended to be taken literally as applying even to wild animals that have been so unfortunate as to have been named by human beings. See Lacan’s comments on this point in Seminar II (p. 178). And Jacques-Alain Miller explained this point thus:

> the most important accident that happened to elephants in their lives was something they never knew: that we have the word “elephant”, and that the moment we have the word “elephant” elephants begin to disappear. Because we are now killing them, systematically. (Miller 1991, p. 30)

To take something as a sign is to cut between the thing as it is, in and of itself, and the thing as a representation of something else. To take something as a sign is to evaluate it in so far as it conveys something of something else. Thus the cut that generates a sign simultaneously generates the two-foldness of the logic of the sign, the duplicitive situation in which the sign has its derivative or secondary being qua sign. And thus the cut that derives the being of the thing as sign positions the thing as alienated from itself in the secondary derivative universe of discourse where it plays the role of sign. And thus in so far as a thing is taken as a sign, it is not taken as itself, but is taken as the manifestation, or embodiment, of something else.

Let me illustrate the duplicity of the sign with a specific example. Suppose Bob is superstitious, and suppose a black cat just happens to cross his path, and suppose he takes the black cat as a sign of bad luck. Bob’s
situation is thereby cut into two universes of discourse as represented in Figure 6. In the first universe the cat is a cat and in the second universe the cat is a sign of bad luck.

Now, in so far as the cat remains merely a sign of bad luck it is not in such a bad position. The cat’s situation is not yet cut completely into two universes of discourse. But in the normal course of things we human beings are subject to a tendency to simplification by means of ellipsis in thought as a result of which “The cat is a sign of bad luck” tends to slide into and be confused with “The cat is bad luck.” That is, “a sign of” is cut out. By this ellipsis the cat is transformed in Bob’s worldview from being a sign of bad luck to being the very embodiment of bad luck. But of course this is a mis-take. Nothing happened to the cat; the cat is still just a cat; it is not true that the cat is bad luck. So to take the cat as bad luck is an error. It is the semiotic error, the third type of error, which is the root of the generic human error which leads to the generic human type of psychopathology. So, if, in consequence of this elliptical mistake, Bob throws a rock at the cat in order to drive away bad luck, he is interacting with the cat in the second universe of discourse, not as a cat, but as the very embodiment of bad luck, as bad luck itself. And yet the cat never ceases to be a cat in reality. And, of course, the cat is not really bad luck. So in this duplicitous situation the cat is a cat and it is also not a cat. And the cat is bad luck and it is not bad luck. This is also the situation of man, as sign.

3.2.3. All Signs are Duplicitous

As was illustrated in the preceding example, as a function of the cut, all signs are duplicitous. And the duplicitous logical situation as represented in Figure 6 is the paradoxical logic of the sign. This paradoxical logical knot is the fundamental unit of the realm of signs (if you will permit me to call a two-faceted thing a unit). All signs consist of such duplicitous units, and all systems of signs, including language, consist of branching tree-like or net-like systems derived by iterations or concatenations of this duplicitous logical knot as generated by the cut.

I consider this fact, that all signs are duplicitous, to be the crux of the problem of language. As a practical matter, I consider this to be most important thing to know and to understand about signs and language for the following reason. Given that language is essentially a function of truth, and given that, as logicians say, truth satisfies, then satisfaction is dependent upon understanding the duplicity of language. Or, to put it the other way around, if the false dissatisfies, then unless one can sort through the web of falsity, one is condemned to dissatisfaction.

In concluding this discussion of the cut, let me explicitly spell out the three basic characteristics of a duplicity:

1. There are two levels in a duplicity.
2. There is a relation of priority between the two levels, i.e. one is first, the other is second.
3. The second of the two levels is false in relation to the first.

As I have tried to make clear in the above discussion, these three characteristics of the basic element of semeiotic, the duplicitous knot which comprises the sign, are naturally represented in Peirce’s diagrammatic logic. And this is why I want to sort out and understand the complexities of the realm of semeiotic and language in terms of Peirce’s diagrammatic logic.

3.3. THE THREE TYPES OF SIGNS: ICON, INDEX, SYMBOL

In the foregoing, we have developed an understanding of Peirce’s three categories of phenomena, and we have developed an understanding of Peirce’s theory of the sign, as an element of the third category of phenomena, as a trinary relation between object, sign, and interpretant. Given this framework, as Peirce explains, we can analyze the sign further by applying the former to the latter. That is, we can use the categories to analyze the various types of signs in the following manner.
First, the trinary sign relation—object, sign, interpretant—can be broken down, for purposes of analysis only, into three binary relations: object-sign, sign-interpretant, and interpretant-object. And then each of these three binary relations can be analyzed in terms of the three categories of phenomena. That is, each binary relationship can be either of the first type, the second type, or the third type. Reasoning in this way, there would be $3 \times 3 \times 3$ (Three types of sign-object relations, three types of sign-interpretant relations, and three types of interpretant-object relations), which is 27 theoretically possible types of signs.

Peirce discusses this analysis in great detail, and he explains and exemplifies all of these theoretically possible types of signs. Without going any deeper into this system, one thing is already clear: the realm of signs is very complex, and thus, without even considering the duplicity of signs, very confusing. Fortunately we will not have to be concerned with all of the possible types of signs here. We will focus on only one of the three pairwise sets of relations, the object-sign relation, which Peirce himself called “the most fundamental.”

2.275 …the most fundamental [division of signs] is into Icons, Indices, and Symbols…

So the question we are focusing on is this: What are the ways in which the object of a sign can be related to the sign itself? Given Peirce’s trinary typology of phenomena, it follows that there are three ways in which the object can be related to the sign, and thus it follows that there are three types of signs in this regard. According to Peirce’s analysis, if the relation between the object and the sign is of the first type (similarity) then the sign is an icon, if the relation is of the second type (contiguity or other type of physical contact), then the sign is an index, and if the relation is of the third type (mediated by a third party), then the sign is a symbol. These three types of relations and the corresponding types of signs are laid out in Table 4.

### Table 4 The Three Types of Signs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Icon</td>
<td>Index</td>
<td>Symbol</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Similarity</td>
<td>Contact</td>
<td>Mediation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Following are some quotes in which Peirce explains and illustrates various aspects of this tripartite categorization of signs.

2.299. A regular progression of one, two, three may be remarked in the three orders of signs, Icon, Index, Symbol. The Icon has no dynamical connection with the object it represents; it simply happens that its qualities resemble those of that object, and excite analogous sensations in the mind for which it is a likeness. But it really stands unconnected with them. The index is physically connected with its object; they make an organic pair, but the interpreting mind has nothing to do with this connection, except remarking it, after it is established. The symbol is connected with its object by virtue of the idea of the symbol-using mind, without which no such connection would exist.

2.304. A sign is either an icon, an index, or a symbol. An icon is a sign which would possess the character which renders it significant, even though its object had no existence; such as a lead-pencil streak as representing a geometrical line. An index is a sign which would, at once, lose the character which makes it a sign if its object were removed, but would not lose that character if there were no interpretant. Such, for instance, is a piece of mould with a bullet-hole in it as sign of a shot; for without the shot there would have been no hole; but there is a hole there, whether anybody has the sense to attribute it to a shot or not. A symbol is a sign which would lose the character which renders it a sign if there were no interpretant. Such is an utterance of speech which signifies what it does only by virtue of its being understood to have that significature.

2.306. Indices may be distinguished from other signs, or representations, by three characteristic marks: first, that they have no significant resemblance to their objects; second, that they refer to individuals, single units, single collections of units, or single continua; third, that they direct the attention to their objects by blind compulsion. But it would be difficult if not impossible, to instance an absolutely pure index, or to find any sign absolutely devoid of the indexical quality. Psychologically, the action of indices depends upon association by contiguity, and not upon association by resemblance or upon intellectual operations.

2.249. A Symbol is a sign which refers to the Object that it denotes by virtue of a law, usually an association of general ideas, which operates to cause the Symbol to be interpreted as referring to that Object. It is thus itself a general type or law, that is, a Legisign. As such it acts through a Replica. Not only is it general itself, but the Object to which it refers is of a general nature.

4.447 A symbol is a representamen whose special significance or fitness to represent just what it does represent lies in nothing but the very fact of there being a habit, disposition, or other effective general rule that it will be so interpreted. Take, for example, the word “man.” These three letters are not in the least like a man; nor is the sound with which they are associated. Neither is the word existentially connected with any man as an index. It cannot be so, since the word is not an existence at all. The word does not consist of three films of ink. If the word “man” occurs hundreds of times in a book of which myriads of copies are printed, all those millions of triplets of patches of ink are embodiments of one and the same word. I call each of those embodiments a replica of the symbol. This shows that the word is not a thing. What is its nature? It consists in the really working general rule that three such patches seen by a
person who knows English will effect his conduct and thoughts according to a rule. Thus the mode of being of the symbol is different from that of the icon and from that of the index. An icon has such being as belongs to past experience. It exists only as an image in the mind. An index has the being of present experience. The being of a symbol consists in the real fact that something surely will be experienced if certain conditions be satisfied. Namely, it will influence the thought and conduct of its interpreter. Every word is a symbol. Every sentence is a symbol. Every book is a symbol. Every representamen depending upon conventions is a symbol.

2.301. A symbol...cannot indicate any particular thing; it denotes a kind of thing. Not only that, but it is itself a kind and not a single thing. You can write down the word “star,” but that does not make you the creator of the word, nor if you erase it have you destroyed the word.

2.302. Symbols grow. They come into being by development out of other signs, particularly from icons, or from mixed signs partaking of the nature of icons and symbols. We think only in signs. These mental signs are of mixed nature; the symbol-parts of them are called concepts.

I believe these quotes touch on all of the important characteristics of this trinary typology of signs, but let me emphasize three points that I think are particularly important.

3.3.1. The Three Types of Signs Are Related Evolutionarily

It follows from the logic of the categories of phenomena, in accord with which every type of phenomena is organized, that these three types of signs are organized like the three categories. The point I want to focus on in this regard here is that the three types of signs are related evolutionarily. That is, the second type of sign evolves from the first type of sign and the third type of sign evolves from the second and the first. Indexical signs incorporate the iconic sign function. And “symbols grow,” as Peirce said in 2.302 cited above, from iconic and indexical sign functions. The symbol is to the index to the iconic in the semiotic realm as animate functions are to vegetative functions are to chemical functions in the physical realm.

Roman Jakobson (1971, p. 351) nicely illustrated some of the ways in which the lower sign functions are integrated into the symbolic level in the following.

The chain of verbs - Veni, vidi, vici - informs us about the order of Caesar’s deeds first and foremost because the sequence of coordinate preteritis is used to reproduce the succession of reported occurrences. The temporal order of speech events tends to mirror the order of narrated events in time or in rank. Such a sequence as “the President and the Secretary of State attended the meeting” is far more usual than the reverse, because the initial position in the clause reflects the priority in official standing.

The syntactic order of the chain of verbs Jakobson cites is a natural iconic sign of the order of the events in time. And the order of the names of the offices in the sentence is in the same way an iconic sign of the rank of the offices in the government.

Another example: The footprint of a deer in the mud is an indexical sign. It is an indexical sign because it was made by the physical contact of a particular deer’s foot with some particular body of mud. The foot of the deer forced the mud to conform to the shape of the foot. This is the indexical part of the sign. And the impression in the mud in the shape of a deer’s foot can be taken as a sign of the foot of a deer by anyone who knows what a deer’s foot looks like because it looks like the foot of a deer. This is the iconic part of the sign. So the footprint of a deer as an indexical sign has both indexical and iconic characteristics. And note also that the ability to understand this indexical sign does not depend on what language a person speaks, but rather on whether the person has had prior first-hand experience of the object of the sign, in this case, the foot of a deer. And note also, as Peirce explains in the following, the difference between an indexical sign and a symbolic sign:

2.304. An index is a sign which would, at once, lose the character which makes it a sign if its object were removed, but would not lose that character if there were no interpretant. Such, for instance, is a piece of mould with a bullet-hole in it as sign of a shot; for without the shot there would have been no hole; but there is a hole there, whether anybody has the sense to attribute it to a shot or not. A symbol is a sign which would lose the character which renders it a sign if there were no interpretant.

We can highlight the evolutionary aspect of Peirce’s typology of signs by representing it in terms of Peirce’s diagrammatic logic as in Figure 7. And, by means of a simple rule of transformation, we can correlate this mode of representation with the tabular mode of representation, which I used in Table 4 on page 29 and Table 1 on page 6. The rule of transformation is this: “To the left of” in a tabular representation is equivalent to “prior to” in a diagrammatic representation. Thus Table 4 and Figure 7 are just different ways of representing the same system of logical relations.

I will consider Peirce’s diagrammatic mode of representations conceptually basic, but I will continue to use the tabular mode of representation, because that mode of representation makes it easier to

Figure 7 The Trinary Typology of Signs

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Symbol

Index

Icon
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bring out certain features of a relationship. Using two modes of representation may cause some confusion, but hopefully the expository advantage will compensate for the confusion. And I believe the confusion will be minimal if one bears in mind that the tabular mode is just a transformation of the diagrammatic mode.

3.3.2. There Are Three Types of Cuts

We have seen that signs are generated by the logic of the cut. And now we have seen that there are three types of signs. So it follows that there are also three types of cuts, corresponding to the three types of signs.

The iconic cut. To attribute similarity or identity is to cut iconically. To impose a judgement that A is the same as B, or that an A is a B, is to superimpose one image upon another image, and thus to take one object as if it were the same as another object. But of course, in reality, A is not the same as B; if it were, then there would not be two things, and one would have no occasion to make a judgement of sameness. An iconic cut does not necessarily have any effect upon either the sign itself or the object it is supposed to represent. To take a cloud as being similar to a tree, for example, does nothing to the cloud, or a tree. But an iconic judgement may have very far reaching effects on the sign, the object, and on the one who makes the judgement of sameness.

The indexical cut. To cut indexically is to really cut, or interrupt, or shape, or otherwise impose some kind of extrinsic physical mark on some physical thing. For example, English farmers used to put a distinctive cut in their pigs’ ears as a mark of identity (the farmer’s identity, not the pig’s) as a sign of the one who owns the pig.

The symbolic cut. The prototypical symbolic cut is the negative command, “Thou shalt not!” or simply “No!” However, the most common type of symbolic cut is the act of naming. Of course, the act of naming is not commonly thought of as a cut, but speaking from the Lacanian point of view, without knowledge of the role of the cut in Peirce’s thinking, Bruce Fink (1991, p. 61) gives an admirable description of the sense in which naming cuts.

Naming cuts into the real - a sort of unhewn, undifferentiated stuff - and makes away with part of it. Metaphorically speaking, it drains away part of the real, bringing it into language, thereby killing it in a sense, yet at the same time bringing it into being for us in the form of signifiers, words we can talk with.

So, although we have not yet explained how Lacan’s three categories - symbolic, imaginary, and real - fit in the framework of Peirce’s categories and the typology of signs, it would probably be appropriate to point out here anyway that Lacan also provides for two types of cuts in his thinking, which he calls imaginary castration and symbolic castration. And as for the place of real cuts in Lacan’s theory, it is obvious that many kinds of symbolic cuts, such as tattoos and circumcision, are implemented by means of and thus embodied in real cuts, cuts in the skin and flesh of human beings. When we explain below how Lacan’s categories fit in Peirce’s framework, it will become clear how Lacan’s typology of cuts fits in Peirce’s typology of cuts.

3.3.3. There Are Three Types of Duplicity

Finally, if the sign is intrinsically duplicitous, and if the duplicity of the sign is a function of the cut, then it follows from the fact that there are three types of signs and three types of cuts that there are three types of duplicity - iconic duplicity, indexical duplicity, and symbolic duplicity. While the three types of duplicity will not come overtly into play in this introduction to Lacan’s theory of language, they do come into play when one tries to put theory into practice, in psychoanalytic praxis, or in the praxis of any other situation of conflict in which one must take a position. When one tries to sort out the strategies of conflict, it is crucial to be able to distinguish the three modes of duplicity, for as Sun Tzu said, deception is the essence of strategy. So what is in play under the surface throughout this discussion, and in all dialogue, is the problem of how to position oneself strategically in the context of the realm of intersubjective duplicity, which we know more commonly as language.

With this strategic note about the tripartite duplicity of language, we are finally in a position and armed with the logical weapons we will need to enter into the most duplicitous and deceptive of all systems of signs - language - with some reasonable prospect of not getting hopelessly confused and disoriented, and thus with some hope of being able to figure out the general lay of the land.
4. LANGUAGE, WILD LANGUAGE, AND THE GAP

We now turn the focus of our attention to language. The first thing we must do is to frame the position of language in the conceptual framework we have developed.

It has already been made abundantly clear, I hope, that language belongs to the third category of phenomena. More specifically, language is a system of signs. And even more specifically, in terms of Peirce’s fundamental typology of signs, language is the preeminent exemplar, if not the only example, of the symbolic type of sign system. So language is a system of symbolic signs.

So far so good. But, alas, we are far from having adequately framed language. This is so because, as we have made clear, the categories are related in an evolutionary way. Therefore, while there is a separate category of symbolic signs, symbolic signs also incorporate the more primitive indexical and iconic sign functions. So, while it is logically possible that there could be a purely iconic sign, and while it is logically possible that there could be a purely non-symbolic sign, it is logically impossible for there to be such thing as a purely symbolic sign.

To put it in terms of phenomenology, while symbolic signs belong to the third type of phenomena, they are embodied in something real, and thus they also belong in that regard to the second type of phenomena. Further, in so far as symbolic signs, qua signs, are duplicitous, they arise from the ground of the purely innocent perception of qualities as a play of images, and thus they are a function of truth, and so symbolic signs also belong in that regard to the first category of phenomena.

In terms of semiotics, as Peirce said, “symbolic signs grow.” That is to say, every symbolic sign - every phoneme, every word, every sentence, every argument, every dialogue, etc. - incorporates and depends upon and arises from the more primitive iconic and indexical types of sign functions, but not vice versa. One way in which symbols depend upon the prior types of sign functions is that each and every symbolic entity is, in and of itself, also iconic and indexical. And a second way in which symbols depend upon the prior types of signs is that when we humans venture to speak language, when we use symbols, we do so in the context of an already on-going flow of semiosis, which is a function of the more primitive types of signs. In other words, prior to speaking and underlying our speaking we are already engaged in a vastly complex flow of semiotic interaction with our environment. By analogy we might say that when a person engages in a symbolic act it is like launching a boat on the river of semiosis, which is the river of life.

So the problem in framing language is how to delimit the asymmetrical boundary. To say that language is a system of symbolic signs is true, but it is not enough, because it does not make it clear how symbolic signs are distinct from other types of phenomena and from other types of semiotic systems. And yet we know from our everyday experience that language is a different type of semiosis. We know that in general bacteria, and plants, and animals are incapable of transacting in symbolic signs. So the question is how can we frame language in the framework of Peirce’s theory of signs so as to make clear the sense in which it is different from the more primitive modes of semiosis. This is the question I will try to answer in the following. And in doing so we will be able to situate Lacan’s theory of language in the framework of Peirce’s theory of signs.

4.1. PRELIMINARIES TO THE FRAMING OF LANGUAGE

I will begin to frame language by laying out on the table some of the complexities and confusions that are built into the word “language” in English. It is important to sort out these complexities and confusions in the word “language” because they are responsible for many of the common misunderstandings and confusions as to the nature of language.

4.1.1. Some Confusions in the Word “Language”

The first point I want to make is that there is no word for language in English. For one thing, “language” is not really an English word: it was borrowed into English from Latin *lengua*. And for another thing, *lengua* did not mean “language” even in Latin; it meant “tongue.” Thus the English word “language” is not English and it does not mean “language;” it only refers to language metonymically.

The distinction between what a word means and what it refers to metonymically is commonly thought of as “just semantics,” meaning a mere quibble, but consider the following. We use the name of the city in which the government of the United States is housed, “Washington,” to refer metonymically to the government of the United
States. Thus we might read in the newspaper, “Washington recalls its ambassador to France for consultation,” which means “The government of the United States recalls its ambassador to France for consultation.” But “Washington” does not mean what “the government of the United States” means. So it would be confusing if “Washington” were the only word we had to refer to “the government of the United States.” If we had to say, for example, “Bill Clinton is the leader of Washington,” it would be confusing in that we could not tell whether it means that he is leader of the city or of the nation. In this same sense, “English is my language,” is also confusing. And thus we must take care not to be taken in by the theoretically pivotal element of metonymic confusion that is built into the word “language.”

The second point I want to make is that we also have a native English word for tongue, namely “tongue,” and we use it in the same way as we use the borrowed word “language”, i.e. as a metonym for language. So we can say either “English is my language” or “English is my tongue.” So, although in English we think of the word “language” as the real word for language, as the word that literally means language, as the official work for language, as distinct from “tongue,” which we recognize as merely a metonym, the fact is that “language” is already a metonym. Indeed, it is the same metonym semantically. The difference is that, since “language” is a Latin word, in keeping with the function of Latin in general in English, its underlying meaning is more obscure, and thus it is a higher class word, and thus a higher class metonymy. Not only higher class socially, but also higher class semantically: More abstract, more scientific. And, more official.

The third point, related to “language” we have the native English word “speech.” But also in keeping with the semantics of the foreign/native interface in English, “speech” does not refer to language, the abstract system, but to the concrete embodiment of language, the brute facts. Language belongs to the sphere of the ideal, speech is acts.

Also along the same foreign/native fissure of demarcation, we can speak in English of the “matrix of language,” an expression which, although semantically similar (etymologically, “mother of tongue”), is considered to be radically distinct from speaking of English as our “mother tongue.” And, of course, because “mother tongue” is English it is concrete and laden with emotion and with deep associations where the “matrix of language” as Latin is abstract and scientific. For example, “tongue” alludes iconically to an organ of similar shape, the organ which the mother does not have, and thus it signifies on the level of language as fetish, a level where science as commonly thought of, science as a symbolic enterprise, cannot go. I will not speak directly to the level of language as fetish here, but the interplay of this foreign/native fissure, which is related to the father/mother relation, cannot be avoided in language because, to the extent that our language is our mother tongue, whatever we say rises and falls, i.e., takes on value, as a function of this allusion to the organ our mother does not have. What we say is our embodiment, our symbolic embodiment, in our mother tongue. Thus, if our tongue is our mother, then our language is our father.

A general point about the word “language” emerges from these observations: There seems to be something about the phenomena we are trying to focus on here, language, that prevents us from naming it in the ordinary way, so that we have to allude to it metonymically. Certainly this is true in English. One would like to understand why this should be so, but the more immediate point I am trying to make is that there is something confusing about the naming of language that makes it inherently confusing when we try to talk about language. I suppose the impossibility of naming language in language is akin to the impossibility of seeing our eye with our eye, which we experience when we try to look at our own eye in a mirror.

A second general point is that the word “language” is used in ordinary English to refer to what I will explain below are two categorically different types of systems of signs. The word “language” refers to human language, the symbolic type of sign system. But derived from this use of the word “language,” it is also used metaphorically, and anthropomorphically, to refer to the sign systems of other animals or even insects, such as “bee language,” even though bees do not have tongues. I will explain this difference between these two types of language below, but the point for now is that we must bear in mind that the word “language” is used ambiguously to refer to animal languages as well as language proper, human language.

There is a limit, however, in how far English speakers are willing to extend the metaphorical use of the word language. It is not a fact of common knowledge, but plants also engage in sign behavior. And it is not limited to marginally semiotic behavior, such as the way a sunflower turns to the sun, which Peirce discussed in 2.274. Plants sometimes use signs with a degree of complexity and sophistication that is unquestionably semiotic. For example, in his classic *Mimicry in Plants and Animals*, Wickler has a chapter on “mimetic weeds.” And he also describes (p. 206) some of the ingenious ways in which some species of orchids perpetrate semiotic frauds. For example, one species of orchid display a group of decoy flies, spots shaped like flies, in order to attract flies, just as duck hunters display a flock of decoy ducks to attract ducks. More sophisticated orchids have contrived to make part of their flower into a dummy female insect, which not only looks like a female insects but feels like a female insect, at least to the targeted male insects (p. 207). In this way the plants not only lure insects to land on them, they also get the insects to come into contact with the dummy flies and to go through the motions of copulation.

All observations lead to the inevitable conclusion that Ophrys flowers have the effect of female dummies on the male insects.
So plants do engage in semiosis. Nevertheless, even though there is no categorical difference between the semiosis of plants and the semiosis of animals, “animal language” is acceptable, but it sounds very strange to speak of “plant language.” So although the word “language” is commonly used in English to refer metaphorically to animal semiosis, or even insect semiosis (e.g., “bee language”), we do not seem to be comfortable with the idea of “plant language.” And even less so with “bacteria language.” This makes it all the more clear that the expression “animal language” is merely a figure of speech, a metaphor, and is not in some sense really language.

The third point I want to make about the word “language”, now focusing only on human language, is that it can be used either narrowly or broadly. In the narrow sense, it is used to refer only to spoken or written language. In the broad sense, it includes all symbolic signs and all symbolic sign functions. By way of example, in the broad sense language includes not only symbols that we speak, but also symbols that we wear, such as clothing and jewelry. It includes symbolic things we do to our bodies, such as tattoos or hairdos. It includes symbolic things we do to our food, such as transforming dead animals into meat (the raw) by cutting off the signs of life (hair, feet, ears, etc.) and then transforming the raw meat into the cooked. It includes symbols that we live in such as houses and tents. It includes everything manufactured, from knives to computer chips. And it also includes symbolic acts, such as genuflecting and giving the finger. And it includes symbolic institutions such as the U. S. Senate and the law (not physical law, but conventional law, both the informal unwritten kind of law (e.g. cover your mouth when you cough) and the formal written kind of law that lawyers practice). In sum, language in the general sense includes everything symbolic.

4.1.2. Ambiguity and the Upper Boundary of Language

From this point I will use the word “language” ambiguously along all of the lines of bifurcation outlined in the preceding section. Or rather, I will continue to use the word ambiguously, for you may have noticed that I used the word ambiguously throughout the preceding. Indeed, I cannot do otherwise. For, if one ventures to speak, whether in English or any other language, one cannot but speak ambiguously. Because language is intrinsically duplicitous, it is intrinsically ambiguous.

To put it the other way around, it follows from Peirce’s theory of signs that there is no unambiguous metalanguage. So it is impossible to attain an unambiguous theoretical point of view in some supposed logically pure metalanguage. This is not to deny that one can invent a metalanguage. Many people, such as scientists and philosophers, especially logical positivists, have invested a lot of effort inventing metalanguages. So it obviously is possible to invent any number of metalanguages. But the point is that the human type of language, the symbolic type of language, is already metalanguage. So all metalanguages are not categorically different from ordinary language. Thus you cannot escape from the problem of the ambiguity and duplicity of the symbolic by means of the symbolic.

This is not to say that it is impossible to escape from he ambiguity and duplicity of language. I am saying, first, that there is no unambiguous position in language. And second, that it is as impossible to attain an unambiguous position as it is to find something that was never lost.

This is what Lacan was getting at when he said that there is no metalanguage. By this he meant that there is no other language that is meta- in relation to ordinary language. There is no other metalanguage or no metametalanguage. (If “other” = “meta-”, then “other metalanguage” = “meta-metalanguage.”) There is no metalanguage that is higher than or more pure than or less ambiguous than ordinary language, because ordinary language is already a metalanguage.

Lacan made the same point in another way: “there is no other of the other.” One can explain what Lacan means as follows. While it is fairly easy to understand the logic of an other, such as a mirror image. And it is sometimes possible to understand the logic of an other other (= a second other). It is not possible to understand the logic of an other other other. It boggles the mind. This sort of theoretical possibility takes you beyond the boundary of the mind, which is to say, beyond the boundary of semiosis. You can conceive of the idea of an other other other in the abstract, and you can even write a formula describing it, but you cannot go there.

Here we encounter the upper boundary of the semiotic, manifest in the mind bogglement one experiences. And this boundary is not just an abstract philosophical curiosity. This boundary is the effect of a law that governs semeiotic, the realm of mind. And it is not just a conventional law, but a natural law that is just as inviolable in semiotics as the law of gravity is in physics. Thus, whereas people can and do violate the conventional laws of language more or less freely, more or less creatively, it is not possible to cross this upper boundary of semeiotic. Even the craziest of psychotics, or poets, cannot cross this boundary, any more than they can fly.

And this law that limits the realm of semiosis does not just effect a boundary in the lofty speech of philosophers and scientists, or in the crazy speech of psychotics and poets. This law governs the logic of every
element of ordinary language. Consider a basic example. To begin, the false is the other of truth. That is easy to understand. And one can understand the false as equivalent to the not true. Thus, one can understand the idea that “untrue” is equivalent to “false.” This is the other. And given that one can understand the other, one can understand the other other, though not easily. For example, “not untrue” is the other other. So we can understand that “What Bob said is not untrue” is more or less equivalent to “What Bob said is true.” However, while “untrue” is possible, “unfalse” is not acceptable in ordinary English because it is already at the limit because it is twice displaced from the true. Thus the ordinary person would not spontaneously understand that a sentence such as “What Bob said is unfalse” is supposed to mean “What Bob said is true.” If one is willing to subject such a sentence to logical analysis, one can figure out that it is supposed to mean “What Bob said is true.” But no one would say it this way in ordinary discourse, because they would not be understood. And, when we go the next step, a sentence like “What Bob said is not unfalse” is just mind boggling. If one uses a pencil and paper one can figure out that it is supposed to mean “What Bob said is true,” but just does not work. “Not unfalse” is an example of the other other other, and as such it has passed beyond the upper limit of language into the impossible realm of bogglement.

Thus in sum, because language is duplicitous, it is intrinsically ambiguous. And you cannot escape from duplicity by means of duplicity, from ambiguity by means of ambiguity, or from the symbolic by means of the symbolic.

**4.2. FRAMING THE TWO TYPES OF LANGUAGE**

As one thinks about how to frame language it becomes more and more clear, even if one only takes into consideration the obvious fact that animals do not speak the human type of language, that there are two radically different types of language. So in trying to frame the uniquely human type of language we must distinguish between the human type of language and the more primitive type of language that animals use.

The difference between the two types of language can be precisely characterized in the framework of Peirce’s typology of signs thus: human language uses all three types of signs, including the symbolic type of sign, whereas the more primitive type of language used by animals and bees and plants includes only the iconic and indexical types of signs and excludes the symbolic type of sign. Thus we can represent this higher order typological distinction in the framework of the trinary typology of signs as represented in the tabular format in Table 5.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Animal Language</th>
<th>The Gap</th>
<th>Human Language</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Icon</td>
<td>Index</td>
<td>Symbol</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Similarity</td>
<td>Contact</td>
<td>Mediation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I derived Table 5 from Table 4 by adding a fourth column in the appropriate place to represent the boundary between the two types of language. Second, I shaded this fourth column to represent the fact that it represents a different type of thing from the other three columns, i.e., the shaded column represents the boundary between types of sign systems and not a type of sign. It is the gap between animal language and human language. And third, while the name we choose for these two types of language is a crucial part of the problem of framing them, and will therefore be discussed at length below, to establish a point of departure I have preliminarily named the two types of language “Animal Language” and “Human Language.”

And we can also represent the two types of language in the format of Peirce’s diagrammatic logic by transforming Figure 7 The Trinary Typology of Signs into Figure 8 by collapsing the first two types into a single universe of discourse. Although it is not overtly represented here, one must bear in mind that what I am calling the animal type of language includes both iconic and indexical sign functions.
Before we go on to explore the distinction between the two types of language further, I want to inject a word of caution. If it is not already obvious, this discussion is getting even more confusing than it has already been, confusing in several different ways, and on several different levels. It might be helpful to describe the nature of this confusion.

The present discussion is confusing because we are now trying to focus on one particular dualism—the two types of language, and this is a high order dualism which evolves from an underlying system that already consists of multilayered dualisms and/or trialisms. To put it in terms of Peirce’s theory, there are the three categories of phenomena, and then there are the three types of signs within the third category of phenomena, and then there are the two types of languages superimposed upon the three type of signs. In addition, as I explained above, every sign is in itself is a dualism. In addition, we have discussed another dualism which I called “The Basic Dualistic Paradigm” of Saussure and Jakobson and Lacan as represented in Table 1 on page 5.

And what makes this already mind bogglingly complex of categories even more complex is that the different scholars whose thinking we are trying to understand use different terminology, not to mention the inadequacies and errors of concept which sometimes underlies their technical terms.

By way of trying to reduce the confusion to manageable proportions, I have put together a summary representation in Table 9 on page 51 of the various semiotic terms used by the various scholars whose views we are considering. I suggest that reader consult Table 9 throughout the following discussion.

Let us return now to the problem of framing the two types of language. As I said above, up to this point in the discussion, the fact that there are two types of language is probably most obvious in relation to the distinction between human language and animal language. And many of those who have tried to make sense of animal or human language, or communication in general, have developed their thinking on the basis of the assumption that there is a coherent distinction between animal language and human language as represented in Table 5.

However, we have already cited evidence that suggests that it would be an error to frame the distinction between the two types of language in these terms. I mentioned above that insects and plants also use a kind of language, and their language makes use of the same types of semiotic devices as animal language, namely, iconicity and indexicality. In fact, it is apparent that even more primitive forms of life such as bacteria also use the same semiotic devices. These facts suggest that it would be more appropriate to reframe the boundary so as to distinguish, not between human language and animal language, but between human language and non-human language, as represented in Figure 9. This way of framing the two types of language is somewhat better, because it includes all of the sign-using life forms in the category of beings that use signs.

But there are two problems with framing the two types of language in these terms. There is one problem with the lower boundary of the lower type of language, which is the lower boundary of semiosis in general, and there is another problem with the upper boundary of the more primitive type of language, that is, the boundary between non-human language and human language.

The problem with the lower boundary is that the category of non-human things includes non-living things, such as rocks. If we frame the boundary of semiosis as in Figure 9 between human language and non-human language, it would imply that rocks belong to the category of things that use the more primitive type of language. But rocks and other non-living things do not use signs. Rocks can be taken as signs and they can emit signs, but they do not change their behavior as a function of signs. One might say that rocks can speak, but they cannot hear. Non-living things are incapable of interacting semiotically.

These considerations lead to the hypothesis that the ability to interact semiotically is one of the diagnostic characteristics of life. Or, in other words, the use of signs is a sign of life. Or, perhaps, one could go so far as to say that life itself is a sign function.

But in any case, if we were to frame the two types of language as represented in Figure 9, the lower boundary of semiosis would be wrong.

The other boundary problem with this way of framing the two types of language is this. If we name the more primitive type of language “non-human,” it implies that human beings do not transact in the more primitive type of language. But I have already mentioned that human beings do transact in the more primitive type of...
Everyone knows that babies do not speak a human language when they are born. In the beginning the human animal, the baby human being, is like other animals in that it uses the same primitive types of semiotic means that other animals use. The human child does not get the idea of the symbolic type of language until about two years of age. So the child only begins to learn the human type of language at that point. And usually the child becomes competent in the symbolic type of language, able to transact fluently in the symbolic medium, by five years of age. This is not to say that a five year old child is a fully mature human beings, a fully adulterated, fully normal member of society, but that a five year old child, unlike any other animal, is a competent speaker of the human type of language. So the human animal begins using only the primitive type of language and then superimposes, in some sense or other, the human type of language on top of the prior type of language. And from then on the language of the human being is a mixture of the two types of language.

This means that the boundary between the two types of language is not prior to the human situation, but within the human situation. Semiotically speaking, the human animal, the biological human being, begins to enter into the symbolic realm, is born in a secondary sense into the symbolic type of being, at about two years of age and transforms himself into a more or less normal human being by about five years of age. Thus the human situation is divided by the boundary between the two types of language.

To put it another way, if, as I have suggested, the realm of semiosis is what we call mind, then we are led by the present line of reasoning to the conclusion that the human type of mind, the normal human type of mind, is not a coherent category of phenomena. It is an inherently divided, and inherently dualistic category. And what is more, the elements in the category of mind are inherently dualistic. Every element in the category of mind is an adulterated hybrid of the two different types of language.

Now that we have framed the two types of language in this way, as a division between two systems of semiosis, a division between two ways of thinking, that are all mixed up together in the human mind, two systems that struggle with each other for dominance of the human mind, this conceptualization of the human situation begins to resemble, to resonate with, and thus to call to mind other similar ways of thinking about the human situation in terms of two modes of thought. If one pursues these similarities, it leads to the realization that the same dualistic conceptualization of the human situation has been discovered over and over again. Many individuals, or schools of thought, who have tried to make sense of the human situation in different cultural and intellectual contexts at different times throughout history have discovered this same fundamental distinction between two categorically different types of language which divide and disturb the human mind.

This observation brings us back to Lacan, because he is one of those who came to realize that the human mind is divided by these two types of language. Indeed the premise that the human mind is divided by two different types of language is central to Lacan’s theory of language, and to his theory of psychopathology, and to his theory of how psychoanalysis works as a therapeutic instrument, and thus to the strategy by which psychotherapy works, or does not work. Lacan talks about these phenomena, following Freud, in terms of the split subject. So in order to understand Lacan’s theory of language, we must understand how he thought about the two types of language. And in order to understand how he thought about the two types of language, once again it will be helpful to approach Lacan’s thinking in the context of the thinking of Freud, and in the context of those who I have called “Lacan’s linguistic ancestors.” So instead of just framing Lacan’s two types of language in the context of Peirce’s theory of signs, we will also frame the corresponding semiotic terminology of Freud, Jakobson, and Lévi-Strauss.

By integrating the thinking of all of these scholars about the two types of language into a single coherent framework, it not only helps us to understand Lacan, but it also helps us to understand and to profit from the insights and arguments and evidence of Peirce, Freud, Jakobson, and Lévi-Strauss.

### 4.2.1. Freud’s Characterization of the Two Types of Language

Freud had an implicit linguistic theory that was basically the same as that represented in Table 5. He distinguished and made systematic use of the two levels of semiotic distinctions we have in view here. That is, he distinguished between “The Basic Dualistic Paradigm” of Saussure and Jakobson and Lacan, which I represented in

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Lacan’s Theory of Language

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Freud discovered this evolutionary system of dualisms very early in his research and he institutionalized it in the technical terminology of his theory of the human psyche. These concepts are the framework of his thinking.

Freud first developed his understanding of the evolutionary logic of semiosis, though of course not in those terms, in his first substantive work, *The Interpretation of Dreams*. This work has commonly been taken on the most superficial level as a frivolous study of the trivial and ephemeral phenomena of dreams, having the purpose of developing a theory which would allow one to interpret dreams, i.e., to make sense of that which is commonly acknowledged to be nonsense. But at a deeper level this work has the very practical purpose of trying to develop the theoretical tools that are needed to alleviate the very real pain of psychopathology, the pain that comes from psychic causes. Freud’s thesis was that, if one could interpret dreams correctly, if one could read the very strange language of the dream, it provided a way of seeing what is going on deep down under the surface of the human psyche, so that one can determine what false beliefs are causing the psychopathology of a particular patient, so that one can help a patient bring those false beliefs to the light of his awareness, so that he can correct his false beliefs, which is the therapy that cures psychopathology. And this work also has the theoretical purpose of developing a theory of the human mind under the assumption that the machinery of the human mind is more clearly manifest in the semiotics of the dream than in any other dimension of human experience. As I see it, this means that Freud’s basic premise is that the machinery of the human mind is the machinery of semiosis. So in the present context I will take *The Interpretation of Dreams* as also having the purpose of putting forth a theory of human semiosis.

Freud argued that, in order to make sense the dream, first one must recognize that there are two levels of representation in the dream, a superficial level and an underlying level, which he called respectively the “manifest” level and the “latent” level, or the level of “dream-thoughts” and the level of “dream-content.” Second, one must recognize that the point of the dream is fulfilled by representing an underlying idea in a different way on the surface so as to disguise the idea so as to evade censorship. In linguistic terms one can say that a dream is a type of indirect speech act. And third, one must recognize that the difference between the two levels of representation is not just a matter of different words for the same thing in the same language, as one might say in English either “cat” or “pussy,” nor is it just a matter of saying the same thing in different languages, as one might say “cat” in English or “gato” in Spanish, but rather it is a matter of saying the same thing in two radically different types of language. It is not a matter of different words, or different languages, but different types of language. Freud formulated the problem posed by the two types of language thus:

*The dream-thoughts and the dream-content are presented to us like two versions of the same subject-matter in two different languages. Or, more properly, the dream-content seems like a transcript of the dream-thoughts in another mode of expression, whose characters and syntactic laws it is our business to discover by comparing the original and the translation. (SE IV, p. 277)*

And having thus formulated the problem, he proceeded through hundreds of pages to describe and analyze dreams in order to demonstrate the nature of these two types of language. Some three hundred pages later he summed his findings up as follows:

*Thus we are driven to conclude that two fundamentally different kinds of psychical processes are concerned in the formation of dreams. One of these produces perfectly rational dream-thoughts, of no less validity than normal thinking; while the other treats these thoughts in a manner which is in the highest degree bewildering and irrational. (SE v, p. 597)*

What he calls “rational dream-thoughts” is a function of the ordinary conventional type of language and what he calls “bewildering and irrational” thoughts is a function of the more primitive type of language used by babies, and other animals, and other living things, and which we now see is also used in the unconscious regions of the adult mind. Freud called the primitive type of language “primary processes” and the conventional type of language “secondary processes.” And he demonstrated that the primary processes involve two different types of relations, which he called “condensation” and “displacement,” and these correspond to Peirce’s iconic and indexical sign functions respectively. I show how these concepts of Freud’s fit into Peirce’s framework in Table 9 on page 51.

Now the names Freud gave to the two types of language — primary and secondary processes, are perfectly appropriate. It is true that the one type of language is primary and the other is secondary, and it is also true, as we have seen in terms of Peirce’s logic, that the relation of priority is the most fundamental semiotic relation. However, if you look at the two types of language from the point of view of our ordinary everyday first-hand human experience, the dry logic of priority fades into the background, and other more vital, more juicy, aspects of the situation become more salient. So, although the way Freud named the two types of language is not wrong, I think it is more useful to try to frame the two types of language in words that bring out these more vital experiential aspects of the relation between the two types of language. The juicy sorts of words I am seeking can be found among the adjectives which Freud, and others, use to characterize the distinction. In the above quote Freud describes the
difference as between “normal” and “rational” on one hand and “bewildering” and “irrational” on the other. Again, while it is true that the two types of languages do differ in terms of rationality and in terms of normality, “bewildering” is the juicy sort of work I am looking for. The root of “bewildering” is “wild”, and “bewildering” means “causing to be wild.” And, if the primary processes are wild, then by the logic of opposition, the secondary processes are tame. And if the primary processes are bewildering, then the secondary processes are civilizing.

4.2.2. The Wild / Civilized Paradigm

Up to this point we have been developing a semiotic frame of reference purely in terms of logic, Peirce’s logic. So it would make sense to frame the two types of language in terms of logic. But now I am suggesting that we frame the two types of language in the framework of Peirce’s logic using words that bring out the pragmatic or dynamic aspect of language. To this end I will suggest that we frame the two types of language in terms of the [wild / civilized] opposition as represented in diagrammatic form in Figure 10. And this [wild / civilized] paradigm can be represented in tabular form as in Table 6.

I have found this way of framing the two types of language useful because it is rich in associations and implications, and thus it yields many valuable insights. In other words, I consider this way of framing the two types of language to be valuable because it is fruitful. It satisfies.

And I think the wild / civilized paradigm is fruitful because it focuses upon one of the most basic axis of life that is in conflict in the interplay between the two types of language. The wild / civilized paradigm articulates conflicts such as freedom versus bondage, play versus work, spontaneity versus industry, pleasure versus obligation, nativity versus alienation, etc. In other words, this paradigm is useful, I think, because it goes to the deepest part of the dynamics of the human situation as governed by language. There is something deeply natural about it. And I will try to make some of the fruits of this way of framing the two types of language clear to you in the following discussion.

As a token payment on this promise, before we get too far away from Freud, I would like to mention that one of the fruits of the [wild / civilized] paradigm is that it makes it easy to see into the deep and very important relationship between Freud’s first major work, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, discussed briefly above, and his last major work, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, a relationship which is very commonly not seen and not understood. The point of *Civilization and Its Discontents* is this: for all of the benefits of civilization, civilization is gained at the cost of chronic discontent, which is manifest as repression, inhibition, alienation, tension, anxiety, etc. Given the [wild / civilized] paradigm we can say this quite simply: while the benefits of civilization may be a function of the civilized type of language, the discontents of civilization are also a function of the civilized type of language. But Freud could not say it this way because the science of linguistics had not been invented yet, and because Lacan had not transformed Freud’s theory into the framework of linguistics yet. So it was much more difficult for Freud to try to explain this idea, and, of course, it was correspondingly more difficult to understand.

4.2.2.1. There are Two Types of Wildness

An important aspect of the wild / civilized paradigm that should be made explicit is that there are two types of wildness. Or in other words, the word “wild” is used to refer to two radically different points of view that can be frame quite naturally in the wild / civilized paradigm.

Table 6 The Wild / Civilized Paradigm

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Wild Language</th>
<th>The Gap</th>
<th>Civilization Language</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Icon</td>
<td>Index</td>
<td>Symbol</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Similarity</td>
<td>Contact</td>
<td>Mediation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The wild is commonly associated with the natural. This evident, for example, in the fact that the first definition of “wild” in the American Heritage Dictionary is this: “Occurring, growing, or living in a natural state.” And generally speaking the natural is commonly considered to be good. A wild thing is free and unfettered and spontaneous, simple and straightforward and true to its own being, wholesome and healthy and exuberant, etc. It follows from these two propositions that the wild is good.

But the word “wild” is also used in a second sense in which a wild thing is bad, e.g., “wild shot”, or “wild hair”, or “wild passions”, or “wild storm.” There are many specific senses in which a wild thing can be bad. For example, a “wild shot” is bad in that it is ineffective and also in that it is dangerous. “Wild hair” is bad in that it is chaotic, deviant, and disorderly. “Wild passions” and a “wild storm” are bad in that they are also chaotic, violent, and possibly dangerous. But underlying them there is a general sense in which a “wild thing” is bad: it is unlawful in one way or another, and thus dangerous. Or, to put it in more anthropomorphic terms, a wild thing is bad because it does not obey the law.

But there might seem to be a paradox in this second sense of the word “wild.” Consider a “wild storm” for example. A storm is a wholly natural phenomenon, and thus it necessarily obeys the laws of nature. So the idea of a “wild storm” as an unlawful natural event is a paradox. Indeed, given that the fundamental premise of the scientific world view is that everything in the universe is lawful, from the scientific point of view “wild shot”, “wild hair”, “wild passions”, etc. are all paradoxical. From the scientific point of view nothing can disobey the laws of nature.

So how can we sort out these two conflicting meanings of the word “wild”? And how can we reconcile the conflict in the idea of a “wild storm”?

These conflicts within the word “wild” can be sorted out in terms of the [wild / civilized] paradigm. The word “wild” (like all words) can be used in two different ways as a function of the two different points of view represented in Figure 10. If one looks at things from the civilized point of view, one will see things and judged their wildness in terms of a mixed up idea of wildness that might be called “civilized wildness,” and if one looks at things from the wild point of view, the natural point of view, one will see a purely natural sort of wildness, that might be called “wild wildness.” Note that the concept of “civilized wildness” is paradoxical in the same way as “wild storm,” and they both are paradoxical in the same because they both arise as a function of the same civilized point of view. And note secondly that “civilized wildness,” what is thought of as wildness from the civilized point of view, is not wildness. And note third that “wild wildness” is not paradoxical. It is the opposite, i.e., redundant. So it means the same as just plain “wildness,” which is pure wildness, natural wildness, real wildness.

4.2.2.2. There Are Two Types of Law: Natural Law & Conventional law

Corresponding to the two types of wildness there are two types of law. In other words, the two different senses of the word “wild” differ as to the type of law in relation to which something is judged to be wild. So if I make a “wild shot”, it is not a shot which fails to obey the laws of nature, but one which fails to obey my desires and intentions. It is a shot that didn’t go where I wanted it to go. Thus the law that it fails to obey is the law of my desire. And if someone has “wild hair”, it is not that their hair fails to obey the laws of nature, but that their hair fails to obey some personal or collective standard of propriety. Thus we can see that “wild storm” is a second order usage of the word “wild”, derived by substituting a second type of law for natural law as the standard of measure. And this second type of law is the law of personal desire or intent, or the law of collective desire or intent. This sort of law is really just desire which has become codified, or sedimented (to use Husserl’s term), and perhaps shared by two or more persons, in which case it can be thought of as conventional law. In other words, the second type of law, the civilized type of law, is language. So the first sense of “wild” is a function of the natural type of law and the second sense of
“wild” is a function of the symbolic type of law. In this way we can sort out the two senses of the word “wild” and the two types of law in the framework of the wild/civilized paradigm as represented in Figure 11.

And having sorted these two points of view out, we can see that, while wild language, like wild storms and wild passions, may not obey conventional law, it is nevertheless governed by law, a prior type of law, a more fundamental type of law, namely, natural law. And so we must suppose that natural law includes not only the laws of physics and chemistry and biology, but also the laws of semiosis, which are the laws of natural logic. Thus in order to make sense of language we must distinguish between two types of law — wild or natural law (e.g. You cannot walk on the water) and civilized or symbolic or conventional law (e.g. You cannot walk on the grass). The position of the two types of law in the [wild/civilized] paradigm is also represented in Table 9 on page 51.

4.2.2.3. There Are Two Types of Logic: Natural Logic & Symbolic Logic

As I said in passing in the above paragraph, it also follows from the [wild/civilized] paradigm that, corresponding to the two types of language and the two types of law, there are two types of logic. Indeed, it is my view, and I believe it is Peirce’s view, that logic is the law of language, that there is no logic apart from language, (and here I am using the word “language” in the most general sense to include both wild and civilized language, in which sense the realm of language is equivalent to the realm of semiosis). So, if there are two types of language, then it follows trivially that there are two types of logic.

In as much as we have drawn this implication from the [wild/civilized] paradigm, it would be natural to name the two types of logic “wild logic” and “civilized logic.” And there would be nothing wrong with framing the two types of logic in these terms.

However, it is also important to consider how our naming of these two types of logic positions us in relation to already existing terminological conventions and thus in relation to relevant on-going discourses. It happens that the civilized type of logic is the same as what is commonly called “symbolic logic” by philosophical logicians. So we can correlate the [wild/civilized] paradigm, and thus our present discourse, with the on-going discourse of philosophical logicians by calling the secondary type of logic “symbolic logic” instead of or in addition to calling it “civilized logic.” And, for reasons of discourse strategy that I will not go into here, I suggest that we call the wild type of logic “natural logic.” So the situation in Peirce’s framework of the two types of logic, so named, is represented in Table 9 on page 51.

In order to appreciate the thrust of the idea that there are two types of logic, one must take note of the fact that this idea does not arise as a new discovery out of the blue, but rather it arises in radical contradiction to the commonly held implicit premise underlying the normal conventional universe of discourse and the currently dominant philosophical and scientific universe of discourse. The common premise is that there is only one type of logic, and that that one type of logic is symbolic logic, the logic of the symbolic type of language. What I am suggesting is that the premise that symbolic logic is the one and only type of logic is a necessary feature of the foundation of the conventional world view. In other words, I am suggesting that the validity and authority of language rests upon this premise. Of course, the normal person, who transacts in the conventional universe of discourse, is not aware that his universe of discourse is based on the premise that symbolic logic is the one and only logic. And likewise few scientists or philosophers or logicians are aware that this is a premise of his universe of discourse. The common premise that there is only one type of logic is presupposed, but rarely discussed explicitly.

In consequence of this implicit premise, the normal person, the typical scientist, philosopher, and logician attempts to make sense of language, of thinking, of the laws of society and culture, the laws of nature, etc., as a function of what he considers to be the one and only logic, symbolic logic. But if there is actually an other type of logic, particularly if it is a more fundamental type of logic, then it is no wonder that the normal person and all of his conventional-minded colleagues are profoundly confused. And, reversing our field, the fact that the normal person and all of his more sophisticated and yet conventional-minded colleagues are in fact confused can be taken in turn as evidence in support of the claim that there is another type of logic. So obviously, if there are two types of logic, one would not be able to make sense of language, or anything downstream from language, under the assumption that there is only one type of logic.

So the claim that there is another type of logic is not merely an abstract logical issue, but it raises questions that are of vital importance for our everyday lives. First of all, is it true? And if it is true, how are the two types of logic related? And what are the characteristics of these two types of logic? How do their laws differ? Do they differ in the nature of their force?
Unfortunately I cannot devote the attention to these fundamental vital questions that they deserve here. I can only pose the questions here, because we are still trying to develop a frame of reference in which it becomes possible to see that there are two different types of logic.

However, by way of briefly elaborating the idea of the two types of logic in passing I remind you that, as I mentioned above, Freud also argued that there are two different types of logic. This aspect of Freud’s work has been almost totally ignored, as far as I can tell, but I consider it to be the most important contribution he made to our understanding of the human situation. If one wanted to try to pursue and understand the two types of logic, everything in Freud’s Collected Works and especially Interpretation of Dreams can be read as an attempt to establish that there are two types of logic and to develop an understanding of how the two types of logic work. Freud gives an abundance of evidence that demonstrates the laws of natural logic, which he called primary processes. For example, in various places Freud pointed out that there is no negative in natural logic. And thus there are no quantifiers, and no determiners. There is a system of anaphora in wild language, but it is totally different from the one found in symbolic logic and civilized language. Finally I will mention that Freud showed that the law of the excluded middle does not apply in natural logic.

Also I will mention that, although I must confess I am venturing somewhat beyond my competence here, I believe Peirce went some distance down this road in his exploration of what he characterized as the three logically possible types of mathematics, and which I would characterize in terms of the present dialogue as the three logically possible types of logic.

4.248. Let us, then, divide mathematics according to the nature of its general hypotheses, taking for the ground of primary division the multitude of units, or elements, that are supposed; and for the ground of subdivision that mode of relationship between the elements upon which the hypotheses focus the attention.

He is saying that there are three theoretically possible types of mathematics, or logic, depending on whether one’s “general hypothesis” limits one to a universe of discourse that includes one element, two elements, or three elements. Obviously, if the “general hypothesis” was that there was only one unit, nothing could be predicated, because predication is a relation between two units, so can be no “one element” logic. Or at least that is what Peirce reasoned:

4.250. Were nothing at all supposed, mathematics would have no ground at all to go upon. Were the hypothesis merely that there was nothing but one unit, there would not be a possibility of a question, since only one answer would be possible. Consequently, the simplest possible hypothesis is that there are two objects

I am not so sure that this is the best way to think about this. There are considerations, which I cannot go into here, which lead me to think of it as follows: there is a kind of “one-element” logic, but it is so radically different from the kind of logic that we are familiar with that it does not seem to be logic at all.

But in any case, we can put aside the question of a one-element logic here, because we are focusing upon the two types of language, which difference is a function of the difference between the second and third types of signs, which corresponds to the difference between a two-element logic and a three-element logic.

Having dismissed the idea of a one-element logic, Peirce goes on to distinguish between what he called “dichotomic mathematics” or “dichotomic algebra,” which is the logic of two elements, and “trichotomic mathematics” or “trichotomic algebra,” which is the logic of three elements.

4.251. Dichotomic algebra can be applied wherever there are just two possible alternatives. Thus, we might call the $v$ the truth, and $f$ falsity. Then, in regard to a given proposition we may seek to know whether it is true or false; that is, whether it is or is not a partial description of the real universe, or say, whether what it means is identical with the existent truth or identical with nothing. Looking at the matter in a different way, or phrasing it differently, we say that a proposition has one or other of two values, being either true and good for something, or false and good for nothing.

Having framed two-element logic in this way, Peirce goes on to explore it at some length. And then he turns to three-element logic at 4.307.

If it is not already obvious, I will explicitly state that what I am suggesting is that Peirce’s dichotomic logic corresponds to wild language and natural logic, and Peirce’s trichotomic logic corresponds to civilized language and symbolic logic. Finally, I cannot resist mentioning a point in Peirce’s discussion of trichotomic logic, a point which the conventional-minded reader would consider to be nothing more than a decorative literary flourish, but which strikes a person who is familiar with Lacan’s discourse as an important point of similarity. At one point Peirce said that

4.309. ...The most fundamental fact about the number three is its generative potency.

And in 4.310 he says that the generative character of trichotomic logic, that is, symbolic logic, has since ancient times been associated with and celebrated by means of the sign of the phallus. Now in both Freud and Lacan the phallus is considered to be the preeminent sign of desire. And so this seminal sign, the phallic symbol, is the connecting point between the logic of thirdness, which is the focus of Peirce here, and the dynamics of thirdness,
which is the focus of Lacan. The phallus is not just a sign of generativity in the abstract, but a sign of generativity as embodied in the human animal, the locus of desire. So the phallus links Peirce’s logic with Lacan’s desire.

Now to get back from this detour into the two types of logic to our focus on the two types of language, let me summarize our situation. We have established the [wild / civilized] paradigm as a way of framing the two types of language in the framework of Peirce’s theory of signs. We have seen how Freud’s way of talking about the two types of language fits in this paradigm. And we have fleshed out this paradigm somewhat by drawing out two of its most important implications, which are these: there are two types of law and two types of logic.

By way of fleshing out the [wild / civilized] paradigm further I will show that at least two of Lacan’s other linguistic ancestors, Jakobson and Lévi-Strauss, also distinguished between two types of language. And, not only do their distinctions correspond to the wild / civilized distinction, but also, as I will show below, Jakobson and Lévi-Strauss even used the words “wild” and “civilized,” or isomorphic pairs of words (e.g., “savage” and “domesticated”), in describing the two types of language.

4.2.3. Jakobson’s Characterization of the Two Types of Language

First, I should say explicitly that Jakobson, like Freud, did make the distinction between the two types of language (wild language and civilized language) separate from and on top of the distinction between the two basic sign functions (the iconic and indexical sign functions) that constitute what Jakobson called “the bipolar structure of language.” It is important to make this clear, not so much to position Jakobson as being similar to Freud, as to position Jakobson as being in contrast with Lévi-Strauss, because Lévi-Strauss never managed to clearly separate the two levels of distinctions. Lévi-Strauss, like most observers of the human situation, never managed to break the spell of the conventional point of view, which denies the distinction between wild language and civilized language. So Lévi-Strauss confused the distinction between the two types of language with the distinction between similarity and contiguity.

Second, although Jakobson did finally make the second distinction (between the two types of language) in Child Language, Aphasia, and Language Universals, he had confused the two types of distinctions for many years. And when Jakobson did finally make the second distinction, he did not make it as explicitly and directly as Freud, and Lacan, did. And thus Jakobson did not institutionalize the distinction in theoretical terminology. And thus he was not able to focus on and pursue the implications of the distinction as systematically as he might have done. So, although Jakobson did make the distinction between the two types of language, it remained as a somewhat murky idea in Jakobson’s thinking.

Third, it is important to state that, although Freud wrote about these two types of dualism long before Jakobson did, and although Jakobson had some familiarity with Freud’s work, there is good evidence to believe that Jakobson’s discovery of the two types of dualism was totally independent. First, Jakobson did not say that he got any of these ideas from Freud, though he did say that his thinking about “the bipolar structure of language” was influenced by Peirce. Second, Jakobson talked about these two dualisms in a radically different way than Freud did, not only using different terminology, but as I have suggested, he was less explicit and less systematic about the two types of language than Freud was. Third, Jakobson came to discover these two dualisms by following entirely different empirical and theoretical paths from those Freud followed. Fourth, and finally, there is evidence that Jakobson did not fully understand Freud’s two levels of distinctions and how they related to his concepts. In “Two Aspects of Language” (p. 81), which he wrote before he discovered the two types of language, Jakobson erroneously tried to correlate the two concepts of his first level of dualism, his concepts of similarity and contiguity, with Freud’s two levels of dualism. That is, Jakobson equated Freud’s condensation and displacement with his own contiguity and he equated Freud’s “identification and symbolism,” which are functions of language proper as opposed to wild language, with his similarity. And as far as I know Jakobson did not return, even after he discovered for himself the two types of language, to rectify this misunderstanding of Freud. The correct correlations between Jakobson’s concepts and Freud’s concepts are laid out in Table 9 on page 51 above, Jakobson first put forth his conceptualization of the first dualism, the similarity / contiguity dualism in “Two aspects of language,” which was published together with Fundamentals of Language in 1956.

As far as I am aware Jakobson first developed the second type of distinction, the distinction between the two types of language, in his discussion of the process of child language acquisition in Child Language, Aphasia, and Phonological Universals, which was published 1968. In this work Jakobson’s attention was focused on the theory of markedness. His purpose was to describe the theory of markedness and to show how it explains the
language universals that are manifest in the structure of the world’s languages, in child language acquisition, in aphasia, historical change, stylistic and dialect variability, etc. And the theory of markedness presupposes the distinction between the two types of language. So in the course of trying to explain the theory of markedness Jakobson had to make the distinction between the two types of language.

However, he made the distinction between the two types of language and he characterized the relationship between the two types of language as a more or less implicit subtext that flowed under and through the main text. He never made the distinction between the two types of language a focus of attention. He never explicitly stated that it was a premise underlying his theory of markedness. And he never elevated the distinction to the level of an official theoretical concept by conferring names on the two types of language, as Freud did (primary and secondary processes), as Lacan did (imaginary and symbolic), and as I am trying to do (wild language and civilized language). Thus, as I will show in a moment, he had to refer to the two types of language by mentioning one or another of the characteristics that distinguish the two types of language. All of this made it difficult to see that he was distinguishing between two types of language.

Consequently, although it is necessary to make the distinction between the two types of language in order to make sense of the theory of markedness, and although the distinction is integral to everything Jakobson wrote from this point on, it is not commonly recognized even by linguists, even by those linguists who are disciples of Jakobson, that he made this second order distinction, the distinction between two types of language. And for this reason the theory of markedness, and much of Jakobson’s subsequent work, has not been understood and fully appreciated.

Now, while it is true that Jakobson did not explicitly and systematically develop the idea of the two types of language in Child Language, as I said, he did make the distinction in a kind of subtext, and it is possible to read the subtext. So I will try to explain how Jakobson thought about the two types of language by drawing out the implications from his statements and from the evidence he cited. And I will correlate the thinking of Jakobson with that of Freud and Lévi-Strauss and Lacan in the framework of the [wild / civilized] paradigm.

Before we look at how Jakobson characterized the two types of language, I think it will be helpful to explain the general problem that led Jakobson to distinguish the two types of language. Recall that Jakobson’s main purpose in Child Language is to try to explain the theory of markedness. To do so he had to lay out the facts of markedness. And this is complicated because the principles of markedness only apply to civilized language, and not to wild language. In other words, the phenomena of civilized language obey the laws of markedness, and the phenomena of wild language do not. This makes it difficult to see the facts of markedness because in the flow of speech of the normal human adult, wild language and civilized language are mixed up together. And, if you do not distinguish between wild and civilized phenomena, or, to put it the other way around, if you put all of the signs produced in human semiosis together in one category, it is impossible to see the facts of markedness. And almost all linguists do not make this distinction, so they put all facts together in one category, so they do not see the facts of markedness. Or to say the same thing from the point of view of most linguists, what Jakobson considered to be the facts of markedness do not appear to be facts at all. For every claimed fact there are numerous counterexamples. This is what Jakobson was trying to get at in saying the following:

If all of the sound productions of the child are tossed into the same heap, it is understandable that the laws of development cannot be disclosed. (p. 31)

Here I can only illustrate the problem that Jakobson confronted with a specific example, but bear in mind that the principle that is at issue in this one example can be extended to every conventional law. There is a conventional law of English that prohibits the glottal stop. In other words, there is no glottal stop in English. The effect of this law can be seen in the negative fact that no native English word has a glottal stop. That is, there are words like papa, dada, mama, doggie, Billy, etc., but there are no words like paʔa or daʔa or maʔa or doʔa, etc. And what is more, although you can make up words in English if you want to, words such as pima, or nipa, you cannot even make up a word in English in the same pattern that has a glottal stop in it, such as piʔa or niʔa. Such words are prohibited in English. The effect of this law can also be seen in the fact that we get rid of the glottal stop when we borrow a word from another language that does have a glottal stop. For example, the word “Hawaii” is pronounced [hawaiʔ] with a glottal stop between the last two vowels in Hawaiian, but when native English speakers say the word they eliminate the illegal glottal and actually say something like [hawai] or [hawayi] or [hawaya]. Similarly, there is a province in the Philippines the name of which is pronounced [bataʔan] with a glottal stop in Tagalog, but when English speakers talk about the infamous “Bataan death march” they unconsciously delete the glottal and (mis)pronounce it [batan]. And in general words with glottals that are borrowed into English suffer the same fate. So these facts corroborate the claim that there is a law in English that prohibits the glottal stop.

However, there are many facts that are in conflict with this seemingly valid law. That is, there are in fact glottal stops in English. There is a glottal stop in the English expression “oh-oh,” an expression of alarm or dismay.
There is also a glottal stop in the English expression “uh-uh,” an informal negative. In my dialect of English words like “button” are normally pronounced [b@n] with a glottal stop. When my daughter was about 14 months old she made up her own word [g@?] for “feces,” and it had a glottal stop. And it is very common for English speaking children to produce various kinds of sounds in play, such as the sound of a machine gun, which make use of the glottal stop.

Obviously if we put all of these facts together in one category, as most linguists do, it would appear that there is no law in English that prohibits glottal stops. And the fact that we change the pronunciation of certain words when we borrow them would remain unexplained. However, if we posit two categories of semiotic phenomena, two types of language related as wild language and civilized language, then we can sort out these facts in a systematic way that allows us to say that the type of law in question belongs to the category of civilized language, and does not govern wild phenomena, at least not in the same way. Then we could say that all of the apparent exceptions to the law must be wild in one way or another, which they obviously are. “Oh-oh” and “uh-uh” are not even legitimate words. They are more akin to animalistic grunts and groans than to proper civilized words. For this reason they are not permitted in a court of Law. The glottal stop in my pronunciation of “button” is not completely wild, but it is also not completely legitimate; this glottal is not a phoneme in its own right, but is only a sub-phonemic, allophonic, variant of the phoneme [t]. It is a kind of illegitimate cousin of [t]. And the sort of glottal stop that can be observed in childish words or in childish play with sound is wild in yet another way. So in this way, we sort out the facts of language into these two categories of language, we can perceive the facts of markedness in civilized language, and we formulate the laws of civilized language. But this assumes that our theory provides for a distinction between the two types of language.

This is the reasoning that underlies Jakobson’s implicit assertion that we must not toss the facts of language into one heap; we must rather sort out the facts into two heaps, two categories, two types of language.

Now that we have prepared a context in Jakobson’s thinking, I will cite some quotes in which Jakobson explicitly distinguishes between two types of language, calling them “varieties” or “styles”:

*There are two varieties of language for the child, one might almost say two styles - one he controls actively, the other, the language of the adult, only passively... (p. 22)*

Here he calls the second type “the language of the adult,” and implies that the first type is the language of “the child.”

In another place, describing the relation between what he called “interjectional sounds” or “sound gestures” on one hand (such as the “Oh-oh” we discussed above) and the normal phonological elements of the adult type of language (i.e. phonemes) on the other hand, he talks about the first type as “a layer apart.”

*...sound gesture, which tend to form a layer apart even in the language of the adult... (p. 25)*

In many places he distinguished the two types of language in terms of the transition in child language acquisition from the purely childish type of language to the adult type of language, characterizing the former variously as “pre-language” or “babbling” and the latter as “genuine” or “true” or “actual” language. For example:

*The actual beginning stages of language, as is known, are preceded by the so-called babbling period... (p. 21)*

*...a short period may sometimes intervene between the stage of spontaneous babbling and that of true language development... (p. 29)*

Finally, the following quote is of particular relevance to the [wild / civilized] paradigm because Jakobson distinguishes between two types of sound and he characterized the first type of sound as “wild.”

*[In the course of development the child] transforms the so-called “wild sounds” of the babbling period into entities of linguistic value. (p. 25)*

In concluding this section, I will mention that it was my reading this “wild sounds” that started me down the road of thought that led to the wild / civilized paradigm, because, I thought, if there are wild sounds, then there must be civilized sounds. This is an excellent example of the confusion, and insight, that can arise from the ambivalence between metaphorical and literal meaning. One must suppose that Jakobson did not intended this “wild” to be taken literally, since he put it in quotes. But I took it literally anyway, under the assumption that even metaphor really means what it says on some level. And I am now in the process of arguing that the “wildness” of “wild sounds” and “wild language” is not just a metaphor, not just an “as if,” but that wild language is really wild. So in this quote we see that what is merely a matter of metaphorical versus literal when looked at from the civilized point of view is revealed as being a matter of metaphorical versus real when looked at from the wild point of view.
4.2.4. Lévi-Strauss’ Characterization of the Two Types of Language

Lévi-Strauss had a deep intuitive sense of the distinction between the two types of language, particularly as this distinction is manifest in anthropological phenomena, such as kin systems and totemic systems and alimentary systems and mythology systems. And he spent a great deal of effort over many years gathering relevant data, trying to sort out the two types of phenomena, and trying to find a way to make sense of the relationship between two types of phenomena. Unfortunately, however, he systematically misunderstood the logic of the semiotic categories.

One problem, as I said above, is that Lévi-Strauss does not seem to have appreciated the insight of his friend Lacan—that the two types of anthropological phenomena are a function of two types of language. Instead, Lévi-Strauss tried to make sense of these anthropological phenomena in terms of logic or modes of thought or systems of classification, as if logic and modes of thought and systems of classification were prior to and independent of language. One wonders why Lévi-Strauss persisted in trying to make sense of these phenomena as if they were independent of language, particularly knowing that he knew that both Lacan and Jakobson had explained the two types of phenomena as a function of language. I conjecture that he was motivated in this displacement of focus away from language by a desire to keep anthropology independent of linguistics.

Another problem, in addition to this displacement of focus from language, Lévi-Strauss also did not realize that the wild / civilized dualism is separate from and subsequent to the similarity / contiguity dualism. He confused the two dualisms, and so he kept trying to make sense of the two types of phenomena in terms of the interplay of similarity and contiguity.

Nevertheless, these confusions notwithstanding, for a number of reasons it is helpful to understand how Lévi-Strauss thought about the two types of phenomena. First, he did marshal many different kinds of very valuable ethnographic evidence of the two types of phenomena, and since the two types of phenomena are a function of the two types of language, this evidence sheds light on the two types of language. Second, he did talk about the distinction between the two types of language in an insightful way, even though he was not talking explicitly about language. Third, in regard to Lacan, in spite of the fact that Lévi-Strauss did not seem to understand Lacan, Lacan did understand Lévi-Strauss, and Lévi-Strauss was very obviously influenced in many ways by Lévi-Strauss’ thinking. So in the following I will briefly try to explain how Lévi-Strauss characterized the two types of language, how his characterization correlates with, or fails to correlate with, the wild / civilized paradigm, and how his thinking, even though erroneous in some ways, sheds light on hitherto unseen aspects of the wild / civilized paradigm.

In my judgement Lévi-Strauss’ intuitive sense of the two types of language comes closest to being explicit in *La pensée sauvage* (1962), which was translated and published in English as *The Savage Mind* (1966). Lévi-Strauss further developed the idea of two modes of thought, which he established in *The Savage Mind*, in his subsequent four-volume study of what he called “mythologiques.” Now this term was translated as “a science of mythology” in the English translations of these volumes, but it would have been better to have translated it as “the logics of myth,” as Edmund Leach suggested (p. 13), or even better as “the logic of myth.” In either case, by using the term “myth-logics” he intended to distinguish between the strange, irrational type of logic that is encountered in myths (and some other social phenomena, such as magic) and the normal, rational type of logic. And he tried to use the idea of these two types of logic as a way of talking about what we are talking about here in terms of the two types of language. But, alas, in this extensive work he confused the idea of the two types of logic, or language, even more completely with the similarity / contiguity dualism than he did in *The Savage Mind*. Nevertheless, if you can understand his confusion, you can translate his thinking into the framework of the wild / civilized paradigm, and you can digest the vast body of data he amassed. So in the following I will briefly explain how his thinking about myth-logic in terms of the raw / cooked opposition went astray, and how it can be rectified and transformed into the wild / civilized paradigm.

To set the stage, it is probably already clear that in its very title *La pensée sauvage* Lévi-Strauss frames his reasoning in a set of premises that is almost identical to the wild / civilized paradigm. But just to be sure that it is clear, I will show how the title implies the wild / civilized paradigm by submitting it to a linguistic analysis on two points. The first point is that the title is marked in the following sense. The general rule is that the simplest form of a noun phrase in French, the unmarked form of noun phrase, includes just a determiner and a bare noun, in this case *La pensée*, which means simply “mind” or “thought.” However this is not quite what Lévi-Strauss wanted to talk about, because he choose to add an adjective to the noun phrase. In choosing to add an adjective to *La pensée*, without any prior mention of anything that would motivate a distinction between one type of mind and another, Lévi-Strauss marks off, or cuts out, a subcategory from the general category of mind. A marked subcategory. And since this subcategory is marked, it must be supposed to be a type of mind that is different from the conventionally presupposed idea of mind. So just by having chosen to add an adjective to the bare noun in his title, Lévi-Strauss
implicitly asserts that there are two types of mind, and he asserts that one is normal and the other is abnormal, and he asserts that he wants to focus on the abnormal type of mind. The second point is that he chose the particular adjective *sauvage*. As I mentioned, the original French title was translated into English as *The Savage Mind*, but it could as well have been translated as “wild mind” or “wild thought.” So in having chosen this particular adjective Lévi-Strauss asserts that the other type of thought that he wants to talk about deviates from the conventional type of thought in that it is wild, and thus he implies by opposition that the conventional world view presupposes that mind is civilized. In this way the very title, *The Savage Mind*, establishes a conceptual frame of reference that is very similar to the wild / civilized paradigm that we have been talking about here.

Of course, as I discussed in regard to Jakobson’s use of “wild” at the end of the previous section, one can discount this interpretation of *The Savage Mind* by taking Lévi-Strauss’ use of “savage” as mere metaphor. And, further, since this sort of intrusion of the metaphorical into what purports to be a serious scientific discourse is characteristic of Lévi-Strauss’ style throughout all of his work, one can discount Lévi-Strauss in general as a mere poet. As Edmund Leach says (p. 13) in his review of Lévi-Strauss’ thinking:

*Lévi-Strauss has not actually published poetry, but his whole attitude to the sounds and meanings and combinations and permutations of language elements betrays his nature….This is poet’s country…*

But it would be a mistake to take Lévi-Strauss’ use of “savage”, or “wild,” as mere metaphor. On one level it would be a mistake because the point of view that takes Lévi-Strauss as a mere poet who uses mere metaphor is exactly what is in question here. So this take of Lévi-Strauss is a mistake because it begs the question he is addressing. And on another level it would be a mistake because Lévi-Strauss’ “savage” is not just a description: he uses it as a technical concept. He makes it the very matrix of his reasoning throughout *The Savage Mind*, and throughout his subsequent publications. Thus we should take *The Savage Mind*, and mutatis mutandis, Lévi-Strauss’ subsequent studies of myth-logic, as an extended campaign whose purpose is to establish that there are, to put it in my terms, two types of language, and to make sense of the two types of language as a function of the logic of opposition, beginning with the wild / civilized opposition, and extending in his subsequent publications to, for example, the raw / cooked opposition (in *The Raw and the Cooked*), female / male, achromatic / chromatic, etc. So I will take his “savage” as framing a paradigm.

It is obvious that Lévi-Strauss’ savage paradigm is almost the same as the wild / civilized paradigm, so we can correlate his paradigm with the wild / civilized paradigm as represented in [Table 7]. And now that we have situated his paradigm in the framework of the wild / civilized paradigm, it becomes possible to see and to precisely characterize two interrelated errors in his thinking. (Or one could think of them as two parts of one error.) We will clarify and rectify these two errors as a way of fleshing out the wild / civilized paradigm.

The first error is this. You will note that I have represented the gap in [Table 7] as a shaded column between wild and civilized language in accord with the conventions I have established for representing the wild / civilized paradigm, but I did not include the name “The Gap” here. By this I intend to represent the fact that, unlike Freud, Jakobson, and Lacan, Lévi-Strauss did not seem to be aware of the symbolic gap. He never discussed the gap either directly or indirectly, either in terms of a gap or in terms of discontinuity or interruption, or in terms of any related concept, such as castration or the symbolic cut. And, thus when he tried to make sense things that belong to this shadowy category of phenomena, he miscategorized them and he misunderstood them. So the first error is that Lévi-Strauss failed to realize that there is a gap between the wild and the civilized.

The second error is a specific instance of this categorical misunderstanding: He miscategorized the raw. While the cooked does correlate with the civilized, the raw does not correlate with the wild: it correlates with the gap. I put an asterisk on “The Raw” in [Table 7] to mark it as being wrongly categorized.

Lacan’s Theory of Language
Table 7 Lévi-Strauss’ Basic Paradigm in the Framework of the Wild / Civilized Paradigm

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WILD LANGUAGE</th>
<th>CIVILIZED LANGUAGE</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wild Thought</td>
<td>Civilized Thought</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Myth-logic</td>
<td>Rational Logic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*The Raw</td>
<td>The Cooked</td>
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The implications of this small error go far and deep, but we cannot explore its implications here. I will just briefly explain just how the raw should be categorized. This is important because an understanding of how the raw should be categorized is helpful in fleshing out the wild / civilized paradigm, it provides a model of how the gap is related to the wild and the civilized, and it provides a model of how to transform all of Lévi-Strauss’ similarly wrong, but insightful, analyses of other gap phenomena into the wild / civilized paradigm.

Going back to the basic idea of the wild / civilized paradigm, the claim it makes is that the normal human universe of discourse in general, the realm of human semiosis, is divided into the categories of the wild and the civilized, with the gap in between. And from this it follows that every more specific normal universe of discourse, every different realm of experience that has been conventionalized, is divided into the same categories. This includes the realm of visual experience, the realm of auditory experience, the realm of interpersonal relations, the realm of clothing, and the alimentary realm of the raw and the cooked. As a function of the evolutionary logic of the categories, the alimentary universe of discourse is first divided into the living and the dead, and only then does the raw / cooked opposition comes into play as an elaboration within the realm of the dead. The raw / cooked opposition does not apply to the living; a living thing is neither raw nor cooked.

One can describe the evolution of the categories of the alimentary universe of discourse as follows. First an animal is killed. This transforms it from a living animal into a dead animal. Second the signs of its animality are more or less completely removed: to begin with hair or feathers, skin, feet, head, tail, guts, etc. are cut off; and perhaps the edible parts of the animal are cut off from the bones; and perhaps the meat is cut up into small, un-animal-like pieces; or even ground into a totally formless mass, like raw hamburger. This transforms the dead animal into raw meat, a category of being that is intermediate between that of the living animal and that of food. The raw is already dead, but not yet food. Then the raw is treated by fire in certain conventionally prescribed ways, i.e. it is cooked. It is thus transformed into the prescribed form of food. This completes the transformation of the living into the cooked, the natural into the civilized.

When the alimentary system of categories is thus analyzed in terms of the logic of the categories, it becomes clear that the raw is neither wild nor civilized, but correlates with the gap. So we should correct the alignment of “the raw” from the way it was represented in Table 7 and we should add “the living” as in Table 8.

Table 8 Correction of Lévi-Strauss’ Paradigm

<table>
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<tr>
<td>The Living</td>
<td>The Cooked</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Before we quit the raw and the cooked I want to explain a little further how this analysis of Lévi-Strauss’ misunderstanding of the logic of the categories as they apply to the alimentary universe of discourse has shed light on the character of the somewhat shadowy category of the gap. This analysis demonstrates for the first time in our discussion that the gap is not just an empty space, not just an in-between. For one thing, there are concrete phenomena that belong to the category of the gap, like horns and feathers, like raw meat. Further, we have seen that the evolutionary logic of the system of categories, by which a symbolic universe of discourse is structured, can be mapped as a series of logical moments, and these logical moments are all situated in relation to the gap; one is the

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beginning of the gap and two take place in the gap. I will briefly explain what these logical moments are and how they are related to the gap.

I call them “logical moments,” following Lacan, because they are stages that are inherent in the logical evolution of the symbolic type of phenomena, but they are not always manifest as overt physical acts that take place at moments in physical time. They are moments in the logical dimension of the symbolic world, but they are not necessarily manifest as moments in the physical dimension of the symbolic world. In fact, the vast majority of the logical moments that underlie an individual’s universe of discourse are never manifest as overt physical enactments at any moment in his life. Almost all of the logical moments underlying our symbolic universe of discourse did take place as physical moments at some time in the distant past, and then they came to be institutionalized in the conventional fabric of our language, and then they became buried deeper and deeper under subsequent layers of sedimented conventionality. But even when they have been buried and fossilized, these logical moments are still there comprising the structure under the surface of the symbolic universe of discourse. And these logical moments still exert force in the present because they are inherent in the logic of the symbolic type of sign.

How do these ancient logical moments come to be there in the mind of a modern child? And how do these ancient events come to have force in the present even if they do not take place in the present? They come to be there in the mind of a child who learns a language and they come to have force in the present as a function of having been presupposed in the conventional fabric of language. If one’s discourse presupposes P, then P is there as a premise underlying one’s discourse. If one uses a symbol that presupposes that P, then one is in the position of having enacted P. Thus, whenever one treats some thing (like a cat) as a symbol, one puts that thing in the logical position of having been through those logical moments outlined above. And whenever one names something, one likewise puts that thing in the logical position of having been through those logical moments. This is the sense in which, as I said above in the beginning of §3.2.2 “The Cut in Peirce’s Theory of Signs” on page 27, to name is to cut. Obviously the death of the thing does not usually become a consummated physical reality at the moment the thing is named, but the death of the thing is presupposed in the logic of the act of naming, and so the death of the thing is a premise underlying the discourse in which the name of the thing is used. So when a thing is named it enters immediately into the realm of the symbolically dead.

While the logical moments in the logic of a certain category are commonly not enacted, in some cases some of the logical moments are enacted. For example, when a very important thing is named, the thing is named in a more or less official ceremony, in which some of these logical moments are overtly enacted. For example, in the Christian tradition a child is officially named in a baptism ceremony which is an enactment of the passage through the gap, typically foreshadowed in the passage of the Israelites through the Red Sea, and again in the passage through the Jordan river.

To summarize, in view of these observations, it becomes clear that, even though Lévi-Strauss was wrong in some ways, he showed deep insight in choosing to use the alimentary universe of discourse as his prototypical category. There is advantage in using the alimentary universe as a prototype because something real has to happen so in the normal case the logical moments of the alimentary process are enacted in overt physical acts. First, the animal is killed, second the signs of animality are cut off, third it is cooked. Each of these steps is a logical moment in the process of the symbolization of food. And I am suggesting, as Lévi-Strauss was, that we can take these steps as typical of the logical moments through which everything that is symbolized must pass.

Finally, let me specify exactly how these logical moments align with the wild / civilized paradigm. The first of these logical moments, the killing of the animal, is the first step in transforming a living animal into food. So the cut that kills cuts the boundary between the living and the raw. The cut that kills is the first step on the road to civilization. The cut that kills is also the beginning of the gap. The second logical moment, the cutting off or effacement of the signs of animality, of the signs of life, is the first of two moments that take place within the gap. And the third logical moment, the cooking, is the second of the two moments that take place within the gap. The process of cooking begins in the gap and continues until the raw is judged to have been properly and sufficiently cooked, at which moment the raw crosses the boundary and becomes the cooked. At this moment the raw has been transformed into the ideal form of food, it has become fully civilized, and so it can be taken from the kitchen in the back of the house and served as food in the dining room in the front of the house.

In concluding this discussion of the alimentary universe of discourse, I will mention again that, his errors notwithstanding, the logic of the raw and the cooked is, as Lévi-Strauss intuited, a very insightful exemplar of the relation between the wild and the civilized, of the relation between the natural and the cultural. If it is analyzed correctly.
5. SITUATING LACAN’S BASIC CONCEPTS

I will conclude this essay by situating the basic concepts of Lacan’s theory of language in the framework of Peirce’s categories and the wild / civilized paradigm that evolves therefrom.

First, as I explained in detail above, Lacan’s metaphor and metonymy dualism (which he later elaborates in terms of alienation and separation) correspond to Peirce’s iconic and indexical sign functions, as represented in Table 9. Second, Lacan’s categories of the imaginary and the symbolic correspond to wild language and civilized language respectively, as also represented in Table 9.

However, the third of Lacan’s three categories—the real—is not represented in Table 9. The real is not represented in Table 9 because Table 9 is a representation of the subcategories of the category of representations, the category of signs, but the real is prior to representation. In terms of Peirce’s categories of phenomena, signs belong to the third category, but the real belongs to the second category. The real is a thing, not a representation of a thing. Moreover, since all signs are duplicitous, you cannot really represent the real because every representation is a misrepresentation.

Nevertheless, bearing this in mind, it is possible to point to the real in various ways. For example, while Table 9 can be taken as a representation of the categories of representation, the paper on which Table 9 is printed can be taken as a representation of the real. Indeed, the paper is real. And the ink that makes up the lines and words of Table 9 is also real.

Finally, there is a very important element in Lacan’s theory of language that we have not mentioned at all here, and I want to point out for future discussion that provision for it has already been made in the wild / civilized paradigm. In Lacan’s theory of language the human subject, the subject that speaks, the underlying subject of the speech act, is not supposed to be a coherent thing, but is rather a symbolic sign, and as such it is essentially split. In his system of matheme-atics, Lacan represents this systemic split in the symbolic order as a “bar.” Now this bar shows up in various different forms and has various different functions in various different symbolic formulas, but it is always there in every symbolic formula, just as it is always there in every symbolic thing. For example, Lacan represents the subject as the letter S with a bar through it, (not coincidentally, I suspect) similar to the dollar sign, as shown in Figure 12. The other formula in Figure 12 shows how Lacan uses the bar in representing the logic of the two phases of a linguistic derivation, such as is involved in metaphor and metonymy, among other things. So the two elements in this formula are related in the same way as two universes of discourse are in Peirce’s diagrammatic logic. So, in terms of the theory of language as developed here, S1 and S2 correspond to the two levels of the wild / civilized paradigm as represented in Figure 10 on page 39 and Table 9. And Lacan’s bar corresponds to the gap.
Table 9 A Summary of Semiotic Terminology in the Framework of the Wild / Civilized Paradigm

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WILD LANGUAGE</th>
<th>THE GAP</th>
<th>CIVILIZED LANGUAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Natural Law</td>
<td></td>
<td>Conventional Law</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natural Logic</td>
<td></td>
<td>Symbolic Logic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natural Knowledge</td>
<td></td>
<td>Symbolic Knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Peirce</strong></td>
<td><strong>Icon</strong></td>
<td><strong>Symbol</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Freud</strong></td>
<td><strong>Condensation</strong></td>
<td><strong>Secondary Processes</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Saussure</strong></td>
<td><strong>Unifying force</strong></td>
<td><strong>Genuine Language</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Jakobson</strong></td>
<td><strong>Similarity</strong></td>
<td><strong>The Raw</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Lévi-Strauss</strong></td>
<td><strong>The Living</strong></td>
<td><strong>The Cooked</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Lacan</strong></td>
<td><strong>The Imaginary</strong></td>
<td><strong>The Split</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Metaphor</strong></td>
<td><strong>The Symbolic</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Metonymy</strong></td>
<td></td>
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</table>

Bibliography


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Endnotes

1 The expression “human psychopathology” is redundant. Only the human species suffers from psychopathology. Thus I will use “psychopathology” and “human psychopathology” interchangeably.

2 I think one must assume that at this time Lacan was already being subject to the influence of Jakobson, at least indirectly, through Lévi-Strauss. In Lévi-Strauss’ preface to Jakobson’s *Six Lectures on Sound and Meaning*, Lévi-Strauss said that he attended these lectures when they were delivered in Jakobson’s course in New York 1942-3, and he explains what a deep influence Jakobson’s lectures had on his, Lévi-Strauss’s, thinking about anthropology. If one is familiar with the work of both Jakobson and Lévi-Strauss one can readily see how Lévi-Strauss’ thinking about anthropology grew out of Jakobson’s thinking about phonemes. Indeed, Lévi-Strauss said in this preface (p. xii) “What Jakobson said about phonetics was applicable mutatis mutandis equally well to ethnology.” It is clear that this is just what Lévi-Strauss did: he derived his theory of ethnology by applying Jakobson’s theory of phonology mutatis mutandis. What is more, although Lévi-Strauss probably did not first hear of Saussure’s theory of language from Jakobson, I think it is likely that Lévi-Strauss did not appreciate the import of Saussure’s theory of language until he heard Saussure’s theory explained and illustrated by Jakobson in these lectures. Thus even when Lévi-Strauss was talking to Lacan about Saussure it is likely that Lévi-Strauss was talking about Saussure in the way that Lacan came to understand him through Jakobson.

3 Obviously Lacan’s thinking about language was also influenced by many others from Plato, Aristotle, and Augustine to Hegel, Heidegger, Husserl, Russell, Derrida, etc., but I am trying to focus on the evolution of a coherent line of thought which culminated in Lacan’s theory of language, and to which these other influences seem to be extraneous.

4 Actually she said (p. 305) that “he would habitually stay at Sylvia’s home during his visits to France.” As I understand it from Roudinesco’s account, Lacan lived in what she (Roudinesco) is calling “Sylvia’s home” throughout these years. Why Roudinesco referred to it that way is another matter.

5 I do not mean to imply that these four scholars were the only ones to have noticed that this primitive dualism pervades human thought. Closely relevant to linguistics, Lacan certainly must have known of the analysis by Frazer (1922, p. 12) and Mauss (1972 p. 63-68) and Lévi-Strauss of the two modes of magic, homeopathic (or sympathetic) magic and contagious magic, as a function of semiotic associations of similarity and contiguity respectively.

6 Obviously this figure is square. One might wonder if this square representation of the space of language is not inconsistent with the idea I put forward earlier that the space of language is gravitational. This tabular mode of representation is misleading in that regard. I will explain below how this paradigm is really gravitational.

7 Actually there are two types of frameworks or contexts in general, and of the word “ducks” in this particular sentence. What I am referring to in this instance as the framework or context, and what is usually meant by default, is the context of contiguity, which in this case is provided by the following word “fly.” The other type of context is of course the context of similarity, consisting of such words as “geese”, “chickens”, etc., which is what I am trying to talk about in this paragraph. Thus contiguity is the context framing similarity in a way that is not the same as

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For our purposes “Tathagata” means “truth.” It is a Sanskrit word. It means literally “thus gone” and thus alludes to the great mantra that

For example, Peirce is not even listed in the index of Roudinesco’s mammoth history of Lacan. Peirce is mentioned in Kristeva 1989, but apparently she was not familiar enough with Peirce to see the influence of his thinking on Lacan; She thought Lacan was still thinking in terms of Saussure’s binary semiotics, rather than Peirce’s trinary semiotic, and she tried to make sense of Lacan’s theory of language on that basis. Muller (1996) argues that Lacan’s thinking was based on Peirce’s trinary semiotic rather than Saussure’s binary semiotic, but is apparently not familiar enough with Peirce to see that the influence of Peirce is much deeper than that. The deepest insight into the influences of Peirce on Lacan I am aware of is Balat, 1992a, and b.

One must allow for the possibility that the many similarities between Lacan and Peirce are coincidental, that they came to hold the same ideas independently. Even if this is so, it would still be true that Peirce developed an underlying logical framework for Lacan’s thinking, and thus it is easier to understand Lacan by framing his ideas in the context of Peirce’s logic. So in either case I will proceed to do so.

This notation refers to paragraph 157 of volume 4 of Peirce’s Collected Papers.

Note that Lacan agrees with Peirce in this regard: “in grasping the function of the sign, one is always referred from one sign to another. Why?


Perhaps I should inject a note here to address some perplexity that might arise from the fact that I sometimes call Peirce’s trinary system of categories “logical” and sometimes “phenomenological.” It is both, as I will explain below.

Is it necessary to say that this is not a metaphor? I mean “seminal” literally. Not biologically, but literally. The symbolic self is conceived, not by body fluids, but by error. And the symbolic self is thus a function, not of biology, but of truth. Of course the symbolic self, the I, is itself a metaphor, but that is another matter.

It is important to note that the way I am using this expression, “wild language,” it is not a metaphor. I use it in the literal sense as a technical term as I will explain in 4.4 “Language, Wild Language, and the Gap” on page 69.

The first paragraph is from Watson’s translation (p. 38), the rest is from Legge’s translation (p. 187-8).

At this level of analysis logic and mathematics are the same, so I will not keep saying “logic and/or mathematics.”

Note that this word has been spelled different ways by different scholars and by Peirce himself, e.g. semiotic, semiotick, semiotic. I will not attempt to maintain any systematic coherence amongst these various spellings.

Naturally, if one wants to understand Peirce’s logic more fully one can consult the relevant parts of his Collected Works, but in my experience it would be better to begin with Ketner (1990) and Roberts (1973). John Sowa (1984) used Peirce’s Existential Graphs as the basis of his system of Conceptual Graphs, a system for representing what he calls knowledge, but which I would call language. This has developed a large body of research in the AI field.

Someone familiar with Peirce’s Existential Graphs will note that I have added shadows to the representation. I will motivate and explain this below.

Note that this type of implication is at odds with the type of implication found in formal symbolic logic. In formal symbolic “If, A implies B, and if not A, then not B” is not true. But in ordinary language it is. This is one of the facts that supports the claim, which I will get to below, that there are two types of logic.

To define symmetric in algebraic terms, a relation (R) is symmetric if the following is true: if R[a,b] is true, then R[b,a] is true, e.g. if Bob is as tall as Bill, then Bill is as tall as Bob. The relation is asymmetric if the following is true: if R[a,b] is true, then R[b,a] is not true, e.g. If Bob is older than Bill, then it is not true that Bill is older than Bob.

“Confuse” means etymologically to “pour together” or “melt together.”

Battistella (1990) is a summary presentation of the theory of markedness in general and the facts in regard to the relation between the past and present in particular.

By the way, Tantric tradition has developed an elaborate system of iconography, a system that is characterized in terms of the concept of the five Buddha families, and this iconographic system is used to represent and evoke the energies of the sambhogakaya. One can see these energies represented visually, for example, in the brightly colored Tibetan Thankas, the central type of which is in the form of a palace.

This ambiguity is not unique: the words “physics” and “biology” are ambiguous in the same way.

Note that Lacan agrees with Peirce in this regard: “in grasping the function of the sign, one is always referred from one sign to another. Why? Because the system of signs, as they are concretely instituted, hic et nunc, by itself forms a whole. That means that it institutes an order from which there is no exit. To be sure, there has to be one, otherwise it would be an order without any meaning.” (Seminar I, p. 262.)

Lacan also agrees with Peirce that this is the way out of the closed order of signs. “When you understand what is expressed in the signs of the language, it is always, in the end, on account of light coming to you from outside of the signs - either through an inner truth which allows you to recognize what is borne by signs, or by the presentation of an object which is correlated, in a repeated and insistent manner, with a sign. The truth is outside of the signs, elsewhere.” (Seminar I, p. 262)

There is a correlation between Peirce’s immediate and dynamic object and Lacan’s distinction between object A and object a.

Peirce also uses the term as “sep” from Latin “sexpex” meaning a fence, cognate with “separation,” to describe the cut in 4.335. Also he describes the idea of the cut as “prespand” and “abstract.” Etymologically “pre-scand” means “to pre-cut,” and ”ab-scand” means “to pull out” and is thus also semantically akin to “cut.”

Because Lacan’s theory is, following Freud, grounded in the pragmatics of pleasure, and its vicissitudes, as distinct from Peirce’s theory, which is grounded in pure logic, Lacan’s conception of the cut is basically couched in terms of “castration.” “Note that “castrate” is from the Proto-Indo-European root “kes” which means “cut.” Of course, Lacan also uses the words “cut,” “breech,” “hole,” “gap,” “interrupt,” etc.

In Peirce’s theory of signs, which we will come to in a moment, a diagram is an iconic type of sign, the most basic category of signs, which

must be distinguished particularly in this context from the symbolic type of sign, because this makes it clear that Peirce’s diagrammatic logic is a categorically more fundamental type of logic than the symbolic type of logic, which is the conventional type of logic.

“Inscribe” can be analyzed into the prefix “in-” and the base “scribe” and etymologically the latter means “cut.”

This line or reasoning is explained more fully in Roberts p. 33-9.

For the purposes “Tathagata” means “truth.” It is a Sanskrit word. It means literally “thus gone” and thus alludes to the great mantra that concludes the Prajnaparamita sutra, and thus by implication it refers to the Buddha.
This means that the trinary sign relation is not the same as three binary relations. As Peirce makes abundantly clear, a trinary relation is more than just a combination of the three binary relations into which it can be analyzed. To those who think the idea that life is a flow of semiosis is merely metaphor, or simply false, I point out that genes are signs.

There are some marginal exceptions to this generalization which I will discuss below.

There is good theoretical reason to hypothesize that there is no word for language in any language. An informal survey by me of the languages which I have readily at hand seems to confirm it. A proper survey of languages is needed.

This echoes a statement made by Gregory Bateson in his seminal article, “A Theory of Play and Fantasy,” in which he begins to develop his play theory of communication. In explaining the communicative value of a bite in the play-combat of monkey’s he said (p. 153), “The playful nip denotes the bite, but it does not denote what would be denoted by the bite.”

The semiotic problem that is at issue here was discussed at length by Lévi-Strauss (1966) in terms of the logic of totemism. He explained (p. 239) that “there is no such thing as the real totem; the individual animal plays the part of the subject partifying, and the sacredness attaches neither to it nor to its icon but to the signified.” Lévi-Strauss cites a beautiful illustration of this semiotic problem in the words of a Canadian Indian. This Indian was talking about totems, but I am suggesting that what he says is equally true of language. “[Language is] like the government in Ottawa, an old Indian remarked. An ordinary Indian can never see the ‘government’. He is sent from one office to another, is introduced to this man and to that, each of whom sometimes claims to be the ‘boss’, but he never sees the real government, who keeps himself hidden.” So it is, I suggest, with language.

Actually this is redundant because all frauds are semiotic. And vice versa.

Note that, although the logic of the other other other other other may not seem to be the same as the logic of paradox, as commonly conceived, which is formulated as “P and not P”, the sort of bogglement one experiences and the limit of semiosis does seem to be similar. I cannot go into it here, but I believe one can show in the framework of Peirce’s logic that these two seemingly different types of bogglement are the effect of the same logical impossibility. There are two keys to developing the argument: first, one must distinguish between two types of logic, which I will do in passing below in the course of distinguishing between the two types of language I am in the process of trying to frame here; and second, one must distinguish between two correspondingly different types of negation (“Two Types of Negation” on page 52).

It has been claimed by some scientists, all non-linguists as far as I know, that some animals, notably chimps and dolphins (and, I believe, orang-utangs), have been taught to use a human type of language, namely American Sign Language. But these claims are based on a profoundly naive idea of human language, and are quite obviously false. The linguistic argument and the evidence against these claims has been admirably set forth in Pinker (1994, p. 340-347).

However, having dismissed the claim that animals are capable of transacting in the human type of language, we must acknowledge that there are many examples of a rudimentary sort of symbolic behavior among animals. For example, some chimpanzees in the wild have discovered how to break nuts open using rocks as hammer and anvil. This is a primitive sort of tool, and so it is an incipient sort of symbol. And the chimps who made this discovery passed it on from generation to generation, so it is an incipient sort of culture. As I see it, such behavior verges on, but does not quite attain, the level of the symbolic type of semiosis. Perhaps this is an example of what Peirce defined in purely logical terms as “degenerate thirdness.”

One could argue that it would be more correct, on technical grounds, to talk about two types of semiotic systems rather than two types of language, especially since only one of the two types is language in the proper sense of the word. But there is a confusing expository problem in trying to keep track of the two different types of semiotic distinctions—similarity versus contiguity and animal language versus human language. And, as I pointed out above, in ordinary English the word “language” is used ambiguously to refer to either of the two types of semiotic systems I am trying to focus on here. So, on expository grounds, exploiting the ambiguity of the word “language” in ordinary English, I will refer to the two types of semiotic systems I am trying to distinguish here as two types of language in order to keep this distinction distinct from the distinction between iconic and indexical signs.

I should note that Peirce took the opposite view, that non-living things do transact in signs, but he did not develop the implications of this view. I do not think it is a critical issue here. That is, I could change my view to agree with Peirce without materially changing the line of reasoning I am developing.

Recall that I am using the word “normal” to mean “conforming to the norm,” and a norm is a convention. So by this standard, even if a person is biologically normal, if a person does not know the conventions and/or does not conform to the conventions, that person is not normal.

You will note that I did not include Saussure in this list. He may have been trying to get at the distinction between the two types of language in order to keep this awareness of the distinction between the two types of language I am trying to delimit here. Nor has Chomsky, to my knowledge. Anticipating developments below where I will assert that the transformation from the wild to the civilized is a function of the negative, note that “civilized wilderness” = “not wilderness”, thus “civilized” = “not.” Thus “civilized love”, “civilized happiness”, “civilized pleasure,” “civilized war,” are not real in some sense or other.

It is worth noting that Peirce holds that the fundamental variable that is in play in dichotomic logic is truth vs. falsity.

To those who are familiar with the five skandhas in the Buddhist theory of mind, it is worth pointing out that skandha means “heap.”

The English word “savage,” which is commonly defined as “wild,” was borrowed from the French word sauvage, which evolved from Latin salvaticus “woodland,” the root of which is Silva “woods, forest,” which was borrowed directly into English as “silvan” meaning “of the woods and forests.” Silvanus was used in Latin as the proper name of a divinity of the fields and forests, identified with the Greek god Pan. In opposition to “wild” is “civilized.” The American Heritage Dictionary defines the verb “civilize” as “to raise from barbarism” or “to bring out of a primitive or savage state.” The base word “civil” means “pertaining to a citizen,” which in Latin is someone who lives in a civitas, which was borrowed into English as “city.” Thus the opposition that is in play here can be characterized as between the language of the natural state and the language of the civilized state. And thus “to civilize” means “to classify,” to cause to talk or act like a city person.” Finally, note that the Greek word for city, πόλις, transliterated as [polis], was borrowed into English as the root of various related words “politics” and “policy” and “police.” And since “to act civil” means “to be polite,” we can add the word “polite” to this family of concepts having to do with ways of dealing with conflict that belong to the realm of the city, to the realm of the symbolic. So we could also characterize the opposition in play here as war versus politics, or direct (blunt, forthright) versus polite (diplomatic), or warriors versus police.

No doubt he was also motivated to choose this particular adjective because of its resonance with the prior texts of Rousseau and Comte.

And it also transforms it from a count noun to a mass noun: a cow becomes some meat.
It is important to note that this state, the raw, is also a field of negativity in another sense. It is not just negative in the sense that it is neither the prior nor the subsequent, but it is also negative in the sense that it is neither good for the animal, nor is it good for us. And in this regard, note that these are two different types of good, two different types of law: It is not good for the animal to be eaten by us; and, the animal is not good for us to eat. Of course, we take it for granted that we are good enough to eat the animal.

Of course this is a generalization about the ideal, the most highly civilized form of food, and thus presupposes the distinction between the categories of the wild and the civilized. As I explained in terms of Jakobson’s thinking about phonology above, just as there are many exceptions to the law in English that prohibits the glottal stop in fully civilized words, so there are many exceptions to the laws I am outlining here that specify the civilized form of food. Civilized law in every culture distinguishes between “real” food, and various sorts of things that are food in so far as actual physical eating is concerned, but are considered to be deviant types of food or at least not fully legitimate as food. For example, in modern American society we do eat vegetables, but they deviate from this system of categories because we do not really kill them by cutting. And sometimes we eat them raw. But because vegetables deviate from the ideal, vegetables do not count as real food in American thinking. A meal that consists only of vegetables is not considered to be a real meal. A real meal must be centered upon meat. Similar layerings of legitimacy, or rather of illegitimacy, centered upon and deviating from the most civilized ideal, are found in all cultures. It is the logical ideal that we are outlining here. Lévi-Strauss cites (p. 336) a different but analogous configuration of boundaries between the fully civilized form of food and a type of slightly less legitimate form of food from Conklin’s description of the Hanunoo of the Philippines:

The Hanunoo regard as a “real” food only that which is prepared for human consumption by cooking. Hence, ripe bananas which must be eaten raw are considered as “snack” foods. Real foods such as pre-ripe bananas, root crops, cereals, cucumbers, tomatoes and onions are never eaten raw. A meal must include cooked food. In fact, meals are usually enumerated by the term: pag’apuy, “fire-making.”

I suggest that the necessity of killing the animal is a universal norm, a universal ideal, in the preparation of food. That is why human beings generally find the eating of animals that have died of natural causes to be disgusting (see The Raw and The Cooked, p 336 for some evidence of this.) And, of course, most cultures go much further in specifying not only that the animal must be killed in order to be food, but it must be killed in certain prescribed ways. For example, prescribed methods of killing animals that are to become food is part of the kosher standard in Jewish tradition.

These two moments that take place in the alimentary gap correspond to Lacan’s “separation” and “alienation,” which are the two logical moments that take place in the gap of the development of the normal (neurotic) personality, the two moments that take place in the transition from the imaginary personality type to the symbolic personality type. These two moments in the development of the normal human persona are discussed in great detail in Fink (19?) and (19?).

Note that we characterize the civilized form in terms of the participle “cooked” and the present perfect inflection of the verb “has been cooked.” This suggests that just as Peirce correlated the tenses of the verb (present, past, future) with the categories (first, second, third), we should be able to correlate aspect and mood of the verb with the categories. And specifically, it suggests that the civilized aspect is grammatically perfect.