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The Criteria Necessary to Achieve Formal Definitions of Sign and Symbol

Abstract

This paper attempts to illustrate a process of analysis that will hopefully open a path to more complete and useful definitions of sign and symbol. It applies a form-content analysis to the metaphysical properties of these two concepts. The objective is to locate criteria necessary and sufficient to derive formal definitions for these terms. Wittgenstein's concept of "forms of representation" is analyzed and applied to the topic. Criteria are outlined that determine the appropriateness of the sign and symbol to be applied as labels. Criteria of definition are then developed using gesture, metaphor, and several other example types to illustrate the use of the criteria in distinguishing between sign and symbol. The structural organization of these two concepts proved to be especially complex and led to what some readers may find somewhat obscure. It is not our intention to be purposefully obscure.

Keywords:

sign, symbol, form, content, class, concept

As this article is concerned with a theory of selectively applied metaphysics of signs and symbols, there will be comparatively few citations. For the purposes of this project, it is theoretical in precisely the spirit of linguist Louis Hjelmslev: "A theory ... may be said to aim at providing a procedural method by means of which objects of a premised nature can be described self-consistently and exhaustively."¹ It is metaphysical

1) Hjelmslev, *Prolegomena*, 15.

because treating of transitions of reality is assumed by indicators and their referents. It is applied, in the sense that it will characterize signs and symbols for common use. We might note that special reference is made to Susanne K. Langer's work.²

Introduction

We will commence with an overview of signs and symbols: namely, the categories that exemplify them. The most important question that can be asked on the present topic is, "why can't this sign be a symbol, or this symbol a sign? Or, what makes a sign a sign and a symbol a symbol? And what, in particular, makes the following remarks of Ernst Cassirer true as to the use of "sign" and "symbol"?"

The plan of a "universal characteristic" ... is meant to encompass all types of groups and signs, from the simple phonetic signs and word signs to the numerical signs of algebra and the symbols of mathematical and logical analysis. For language is not a collection of discursive conventional signs for discursive concepts, but is the symbol and counterpart of the same divine life which everywhere surround us visibly and invisibly, mysteriously yet revealingly.³

Note especially that language is at once a set of signs *and* in itself a symbol. His point, of course, is that we begin treating it more like a symbol. Symbols relate to wholes, to all among a group, to pluralities existing as unities, to infinitudes, to some conceptualizations and emblems. What these have in common include the meeting or crossing of barriers – incommensurables, limits, transformations, and emergent properties. The two types of emblems will be explained in the following section.

Wholes – the synecdoche symbolizes a whole; a seed symbolizes growth or development of a whole organism; flags symbolize entire social units.

All among a group – a membership badge symbolizes everyone in a group; the caduceus symbolizes everyone practicing medicine; the triad of sign-object-interpretant symbolizes everything of Charles S. Peirce's semiotic.

Pluralities as unities – class titles symbolize the plurality of their membership; *E pluribus unum* symbolizes the United States as a single nation.

Infinitudes – the Aristotelian paradigm symbolizes the four-fold causation of an infinitude of examples; via Whitehead or Leibniz every particle/monad symbolizes the universe.

Conceptualizations – black symbolizes death, impurity and disease; green symbolizes "go"; a dove is symbolic of peace.

Emblems (type one) – chevrons on the shirt or coat are symbolic of rank or office.

Signs relate to any two or more objects characterized by emblematic, indexical, identificational and/or revelatory functions.

2) Her form-content analyses with respect to myth, music and art generally, are brilliant, and her occasional jaunts into romanticism are to the point.

3) Cassirer, *The Philosophy*, 132, 151.

Emblems (type two) – the governmental response was a sign of twenty-first century plutocracy; this case is emblematic of, a sign of, a larger problem.

Indices – lighting is a sign of thunder; violation of a “point of honor” is a sign of an anticipated challenge.

Revelations – shame can be a sign revealing the fact of having lied or boasted; excruciating jaw pain is usually a sign revealing a tooth abscess; smoke is a sign of fire.

Identifications – a rose is the sign of a flower; Lamborghini is the sign of a car; green is the sign of a range of light waves

In figure (1) the result of the indicator (a sign or symbol) is always a relation between its internal and external referents. Consider Peirce: “Aquinas illustrates ... virtue, which is a form, and, as such, has no *materia ex qua* [matter out of which]; *but it has a subject in which it inheres and an object upon which it is exercised.*”⁴ There are four classes of internal referents. The first is the primary which carries the meaning; the second carries the denotative content (the first two are often one and the same); the third includes the connotative qualities, and the fourth deals with auxiliary aspects. For the word “house,” the real, actual house is the denotative referent; the external referent is constituted of those reading the word and those normally interested in any given house. Here the word covers both the primary and denotative classes. In art, the primary internal referent is the meaning, given by the observer. The objects from which art is created constitute the denotative referent, and the connotative is the artist’s intentions (a quality) and the *style* of the work. The external referent will be those who look at the art.

Often, the denotative (and occasionally the connotative) referents are out of sight, as with the hood ornament of a jaguar. The print on a sign is its primary internal referent (it delivers meaning). The author’s intent is the connotative. If there is a pictorial on the sign, its internal referent is denotative. The pictorial of swerved lines behind a vehicle have the actual vehicle and iced roadway as the denotative referent. In the case of a stop sign, the word “stop” is the primary; the denotative is the physical sign, and the pole is the auxiliary; but the shape and color of the sign are connotative. The stop sign is a “complex” entity comprised of one sign and two symbols (color and shape).

Using these rules, it will be discovered that most concepts (if not all) maintain both sign and symbol referent systems. Consider the concept “institution.” It is a sign of offices; it is a symbol of organized cultural practice. The noun “color” is a sign of a range of light wavelengths; it is a symbol of the totality of hues. Note that definitions can reflect either a sign or a symbol. The analyses offered herein generally refer to the common use of a given word, not as to why either of the above examples are normally used as symbols, but what makes them symbols to begin with.

The internal referents can be actual or imagined, and the external referent, nearly always a human observer, can approach the internal referent in person or simply imagine it. The result of the relation is illustrated by the circle, which is also the signified. Figure (1) is a “core form” – see the section The Form of Representation (core form) – in common to each scenario below. We abbreviate it RIR (internal Referent-Indicator-external Referent).

There are six primary ways in which objects, indicants and observers relate to one another –

The first scenario (OIO) describes an Object referred to by an Indicator, which communicates it to one or more Observers. This is typified by language (words) and the works of representational art. (Abstract art typically features only the indicator and the observer, IO.) The second is a Multi-Object-Indicator-Observer (MOIO) where among three or more objects one of them is the indicator whose relation to the rest is at issue.

4) Peirce, *The Collected Papers*, 6.359. My emphasis.

An example is the archetypal function of a vertical array of progressively more distant functions from the archetype (see below). Third, we have one or more observers interacting in the Observer-Observer (ObsObs) scenario, where the intent is to discover if an any action might constitute a sign or symbol of the other(s), for example a gesture of good will (see below).

Fourth is the complex sign or symbol Object-Multiple-Indicator-Observer (OMIO), where one type contains multiple indicators: one primary and one or more secondary of the other type. Traffic signals are signs employing three symbols. Fifth, we have entities that are at once sign and symbol Referent-Indicator-Referent (RIR/RIR) of which the scales of justice are an example (see below). Lastly, we have a peculiar but not uncommon scenario applicable primarily to artists and writers. The Multiple-Object-Indicator-Observer (MO-I/O) indicates that the observer is at the same time the sign or symbol, based on what they have in their mental picture as it relates to a reality of plural objects. We find it worthwhile to keep these distinctions in mind. A useful exercise is to convert examples of each of the six subtypes back into the RIR base schema.

For denotative words, Susanne Langer always inserts “concept” into what here is the external referent, one that she says is experienced prior to the concrete equivalent, the internal denotative referent.⁵ In other words, she is apparently saying that regardless the presence or absence of a denotative referent, conceptualization comes first (presumably of the word). She is of course correct. This, however, says nothing as to the referent. If the word “house” means an actual house, it *does not* mean the “concept” of house. Suppose instead that an external referent is present along with the denotative referent: we think of a father teaching his son what “house” means, and as he points to the structure he says “house.” Many words (geography, for example) have no denotative or connotative internal referents but must by definition carry meaning. For these instances the dictionary gives definitions that will somewhat characterize the meaning, but not so well as to avoid referring to the word as a “concept.”

As for definitions, we begin with trimmed down definitions of sign and symbol from a strictly functional vantage.

The *sign* is authored; it brings together content for presentation to external referents, implying similarity between sign and content.

The *symbol* is arbitrarily created; it brings together large differentials between indicator and referent (whether of multitude, magnitude and/or kind), to enable a reference in meaning, and sometimes to secure psychic “identification” between symbol and its various referents.

The reader may wonder that marked differences are a prerequisite for symbology. In explaining a particular philosophical approach to the symbol (it applies, if less strenuously, to the sign), Cassirer writes, “the synthesis effected can only be a synthesis of different elements, not of elements that are alike or similar in any respect. The more the sound resembles what it expresses; the more it continues to ‘be’ the other, the less it can ‘signify’ that other.”⁶

Metaphysics and its Terminology

Structural metaphysics is, in our view, the effort to construct a paradigmatic model whose few constituents reflect the basic relations between fundamental elements comprising the nascent universe and the events since.⁷ From Aristotle to Peirce to Paul Weiss, our use of the method differs from the others mentioned only in the

5) Langer, *Philosophy in a New Key*, 133. The usage is not hers; Hobbes and Locke advanced the idea. See Cassirer, *The Philosophy*, 134.

6) Cassirer, *The Philosophy*, 189.

7) For structuralism see Piaget, *Structuralism*; and Pettit, *The Concept of Structuralism*.

choice of archetypal labels: two of the four matching two of four established by Paul Weiss.⁸ We prefer the first example in the following short listing because it is more archetypal, the elements of which are in the order of Aristotle's formal, efficient, material, and final causes, and which correctly *symbolizes* his method:

- Essence, Being, Existence, Reality
- Essence, Action, Existence, God
- Formal, Efficient, Material, Final

These quatrads are what we call "functions." The second function above is that of Weiss⁹ and the third is of course Aristotle's, which we add to demonstrate the formal similarities vertically through the functions. In the model we are using here, from the point of content, Essence gives rise (possibly) simultaneously to Being and Existence which, on interacting with each other generate entities and other categories of Reality. (This is assuredly not Sartrean existentialism.¹⁰) From the vantage of form, compare the first and third functions above; the recursive nature of the vertically oriented series of functions is tied together by forms that are reflecting modal differences in reality. These play to symbolization, whereas the content within each function is the same, which in this case goes to the sign.

Since each function is related in content yet still different, each function is the sign of every other. We know it is a sign because it is emblematic, indexical, revelatory *and* identificational. While the sign is a one-one relation with its denotative referent, the symbol is often a one-many relation. (Unless otherwise noted, the "referent" will hereinafter refer specifically to the denotation.) The symbol includes *all* functions upwards from the location of the indicator in the array. But since the whole point of the exercise is to advance vertically along the four placements, the paradigm is deemed symbolic.

Form is passive in the archetypal function at the Existence placement; content is active in the paradigm, at the Being placement. When the Essence is authorial with a method and subject, one obvious application is to the artist who, as author, derives a style. In stylization, content and form mutually extend and expand together to encompass and fill extent and shape. Content is here the driving inspiration with form the ancillary co-executor. Compare the following functions:

- Author, Content, Form, Style
- Author (C/F*), Method-in-use, Subject matter, Style (F – C*)
- Essence, Property, Characteristic, Substance (Feature)

No work of art is without style. The artist's mental operations and technique (together with the method) operating upon a subject (imaginary or material) cannot help but create a style along with the pictorial representation presented to the viewer. The relation of style to feature will occupy us anon. The symbols after "author" and "style" in the second function above are discussed below. The author is at Essence because it is essential to everything else in the function.

8) Weiss, "Being, Essence and Existence," 69–92. This article is general and is an in-depth approach to these three archetypal elements. I regret having long ago lost the reference illustrating his Essence, Action, Existence, God function.

9) For those curious about the presence of God in his system, I recommend the following: "Weiss ... seems a panentheist of some kind, since he affirms human freedom and says that, in prayer, both God and the worshiper are transformed. He implies that deity is a unity somehow inclusive of all things so far as they are good. He does not say that God is wholly necessary or that the world is wholly contingent." See *Encyclopedia.com*, <https://www.encyclopedia.com/environment/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/pantheism-and-panentheism>.

10) Sartre, *Existentialism Is a Humanism*, 17–22, 55.

Definitions

Before commencing with the analysis, there are some terms and ideas that need explanation or clarification. The following deals with the words form and content, transcendence, denotation, connotation, relation, fact, *homoiousia*, concepts, emblems, and the relations of polarity along with Wittgenstein's "formal representation."

Form is a factual relation expressing for present purposes the continuity of discontinuity across the boundary between content and non-content, where content is 1) pictorially, the basis of meaning and/or what is contained within form; 2) linguistically, the meaning; and 3) in empirical reality, the area enclosed by a solid form or the make-up of such a form, as well as any object in terms of its embracing form across all borders, internal and external. For the importance of form, C. W. Hendel, speaking of Kant's philosophy of form, says that "the forms are the universal and necessary conditions of the very first appearance of anything whatsoever to our human perception, and furthermore of its becoming progressively intelligible to our understanding."¹¹

Shaftesbury's view is worth citing (as paraphrased by Cassirer). "Form can never be created from matter, it is and remains unborn and imperishable, a pure ideal unity, which imprints itself upon multiplicity and so gives it definite form."¹² Form "follows" matter (content) in nearly all cases except where style is concerned, so it does not "arise" from matter. The agency "guiding" wedges in grapefruits, for example, is "inherent" form.

"Inherent form" is the internal form which presents indirectly when it does present. It is substantially Shaftesbury's form. The form reflected as motion or movement, thought and thinking, digestion and metabolism, are inherent forms. Inherent form "drapes" over and surrounds every object or entity in the universe. The linguistic (syntactic) form is reflected in the arrangement and order of words in meaningful sentences (meaning is not an assured effect in some expressions that exhibit syntactic form; consider Carroll's *Jabberwocky*: *Twas brillig, and the slithy toves*). "Implicit form" arises from naming a referent to a symbol. Each type of form will be further discussed below.

* * *

Metaphysics employs a variant logic where for any two items the relations of related or shared essence are denoted by a series of symbols, beginning with X*/Y (X in terms of Y) and, seven steps later, finishing with Y*/X with four symbols using dashes to indicate relations such as X* – Y (X "exists as" Y). The asterisks designate a weighted element; thus X*/Y is practically all X with very little of Y showing through. So it is possible for metaphysics to accept that a sign can exist as a symbol and vice versa. Where X stands for content and Y* for emphasized form, we have "author" in the Essence position of its function (above). Similarly, "style" is rendered "form existing as (stressed) content." In the archetypal function, Existence carries some Being and Being carries some Existence (see below; archetypal terms are capitalized for easy recognition).

* * *

There are concepts that are true polar opposites, as for example the opposite of a point on a circle, or the Earth's antipodes. But most seeming opposites actually contain, in keeping with Daoist thought, aspects of their opposing entity. The metaphysics of this approach was advanced by, among others, the American philosopher Morris R. Cohen (1880–1947). "These suggestions of a possible metaphysics," he opined:

11) Hendel, "Introduction," 9.

12) In Cassirer, *The Philosophy*, 143. We could not locate the excerpt in the work he cites at this page.

May be objected to either as commonplace, as unimportant, or as unjustified. Against the first objection we must note that sound metaphysics like science itself should begin – though it should not end – with the commonplace. As against the second and third objections we may urge that the full meaning, importance, and justification of a metaphysical doctrine can be seen only in its development.¹³

We bring this to the reader's attention because it will be serviceable; it will make more obvious what a commonplace view suggests but which formal logic tends to disapprove.

* * *

The *transcendent* is, generally, a reality beyond the real, the natural (i.e., empirical reality). It implies a full-throated deviation from normal reality: words vs. imaginings, real vs. fictional, and so forth. Signs and symbols both require a significant change in reality between the indicator label (sign/symbol) and their referent(s). But by "significant" we include modifications to reality short of a full transcendence. (Humans vs. machines provides an example.) We will refer to both of these together as *modes* of reality. Signs and symbols, to be labelled as such, require a change in mode of reality between indicator and referent. In each case there is usually something both common to (more relevant to the sign) and different between indicator and referent as an objective observer would note.

Associated with transcendence are the ideas regarding the origin of elementary *relations* and *facts*. Every relation can be thought of as a *symbol* of each of innumerable kinds and types of possible related substrates that can be called a "relation." Relation, as a word, is not only a symbol, but is also a *subjective* transcendental – we recognize its relation to its referents subjectively while recognizing it as transcendent to those constituents. The fact, on the other hand, is a *sign* of the similar content constituting the fact of relations that have been assured of reality above the level of entity (e.g., substance). It is an *objective* transcendental – by objective I mean what is necessary (nature speaks and opinion is obviated, as in the methods of science), what is deemed real, and what has universal acceptance, or at least the acceptance of authorities for the topic under discussion. Fact and relation will be discussed further below.

* * *

Much will be made of the term "denotation" in this paper, and related to that is the possible confusion between it and the referent(s) of the sign or symbol. In Langer, denotation is contrasted with "connotation," where she says that "the connotation of a word is the conception it conveys."¹⁴ Thus if there is a conceptualization, it is connoted. A reputable thesaurus compares the two terms as follows. "One might say that the word 'mother' *denotes* 'a woman who is a parent' but *connotes* qualities such as 'protection' and 'affection'."¹⁵ We note complete agreement with this thesaurus.

Peirce offered interesting definitions of these two terms: "There is, first, the direct reference of a symbol to its objects, or its denotation; second, the reference of the symbol to its ground, through its object, that is, its reference to the common characters of its objects, or its connotation."¹⁶ This applies to signs as well except that the referents are usually individual items instead of groups.

13) Cohen, *Reason and Nature*, 168.

14) Langer, *Philosophy in a New Key*, 64.

15) See Lindberg, *The Oxford American Writer's Thesaurus*, s.v. connotation, 171.

16) Peirce, *The Collected Papers*, 1.559.

* * *

The term *homoiousic* goes back to the Christological conflicts of the fourth century. It was the term assuming a mediating position from the *homoousians*, those who believed in accord with the Nicene formula which appeared to impute a single “monad” out of which the three-fold God came to be, which in turn was interpreted to mean that there was to be no ontological distinction between the three. The *homoiousians* mediated with a formula providing for “a similar *ousisa* [true being or essence],” which allowed the interpretation (Jaroslav Pelikan quotes Epiphanius) “‘like [the Father] in every respect,’ rather than merely ‘like the Father’ but not in *ousia*.”¹⁷ In other words, *homoiousia* denotes a likeness more complete than ordinary, but less than fully essential. It is this kind of likeness that we feel the sign and symbol presuppose.

* * *

With symbols we can speak of either indicator or referent as *emblematic* of the other with specific regard either to form or to content (see below). “Emblematic” has two meanings, each of which harkens back to the noun form, which refers to devices that reflect and qualify the character or history of a family, nation, office, institution or imposing structure – whence the emblems on a military coat representing the level of office or rank.¹⁸ If a word has connotations that are characterized by stylistic distinctions, these are examples of “character” and are called “type one” emblems. This usage reflects the noun faithfully. The other usage departs from the literal definition and reflects general similarity of appearance or behavior. It is this variation that applies to the sign. These are “type two” emblems.

* * *

Three kinds of concept will be first classified as “primary” or “derived.” The latter makes for two more kinds of concept abstracted ultimately from groups of what we call *primitives* (underived non-conceptual¹⁹ words – green, creek, blue jay, etc.). These two kinds include what we have called *titled* classes (i.e., legitimate classes – color, waterway, bird, etc.), and *named* (i.e., quasi-class – machine, toy, bric-a-brac, etc.). What we call *primary* (i.e. underived non-class) entails concepts like phoneme, concept, geography, and so forth. Titled classes have members much more alike than non-alike; named classes have members more unlike than alike. The distinction is relevant: titles of classes are symbolic of their membership; primitives, named classes, and primary concepts are *not* symbolic. They are all identificational signs, including the relation of the primitives to the titled class members. There is an exception to be explicated: some words will have a number of connotative items. These make for a separate and independent matter. Even a primitive or primary can become the symbol for connotative items.

The word “house” is a primitive that happens to have very few denotative referents (shanty, mansion, etc.) and quite a number of connotative referents, all of them concepts – English Tudor, French provincial, etc.). “House” appears to be a quasi-class whose denoted members are also primitives and only marginally related to the canopy word. Consideration should be given to verbal practices. Few people can or will identify a house

17) Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition*, 209.

18) Lindberg, *Oxford Thesaurus*, s.v. emblem, emblematic, 286–87.

19) I use “primitive” to distinguish underived non-conceptual from “primary” underived non-class concepts. Some define the “primitive” as *any* underived word. See *Wiktionary.org*, s. v. primitive-English-etymology. <https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/primitive#Etymology>. Others do not, see Pei and Gaynor, *Dictionary of Linguistics*, 175.

with a shanty, only slightly more with a mansion. The word's denotation is therefore only analogous (not a sign) to the other denotations, and cannot be a symbol to the connotations for the following reason: since the house has a style as well, it is just one more connotation; it therefore cannot stand aloof as a true class title – it cannot be usefully abstracted from items holding too much in common with it. The relation of the house to its connotative likenesses will simply be a “type one” emblematic relation.

Derived concepts are symbolic because of 1) difference in mode of reality between symbol and referents; 2) a “type one” emblematic relation between the indicator's primary referent (the definition of the title word) and its external referents (the class members) in which the *character* (as a formal element) of the title's denotative referent is emblematic of the character in each member; and 3) a core form (form of representation) in common between indicator and external referents, namely, the character.

As to the definition of concept, three maxims seem to apply: 1) they are normally substantives; 2) if you cannot point to it, it is probably a concept, and 3) if a definition does not adequately elaborate the word, it is definitely a concept.

* * *

It seems that what Wittgenstein means by “form of representation” would more accurately be rendered “presentational form,” something we will, for convenience, reduce to “core form,” not to be confused with “inherent” or “implicit” form. The form that is “presented” to the observer is what a camera collects (our conceptual interpretations are beside the point), and what our vision sees, generally with sufficient accuracy. It is comprised essentially of the orientation of parts within a visual whole, the size, extent, and (if it exists) its motion and the relations of objects in space and time. Ordinarily we would not put much stock in this method. It is self-evident and overly simplistic. What analytical value can it possibly have? Again, ordinarily, we would say, not much, frankly. And then along came the sign and symbol, whose difficulty of identification and sometimes of application, to say nothing of definition, put a very different face to this presentational form, the relevance of which will soon become clear.

Introducing Forms

While we will discuss the inherent form of a symbol and its referent(s) in due course, one point requires explanation here. *The act of naming an object to be a symbol of a given referent has certain metaphysical effects, not the least of which is that the name of the symbol and the name of the referent are now linguistically related in form.* To be precise, it is a *homoiousic* relation in regard of “implicit” form. It could therefore be argued that all words, being conventional, and generating a formal relation with their internal referent, must on that account be symbolic. But here is where an abstract rule gets in the way of reality and common sense.

The function of language is to communicate (often widely), which is generally the function of the sign. When sounds were originally given to represent objects or events, the sound was a sign with respect to a specific item or class of similar items. Anthropologists will remind us that words were long thought to *share* essence with the referent. “Now for all premodern societies,” explains Eliade, “the individual's name is equivalent to his true existence, to his existence as a spiritual being.”²⁰ In mythic language, avers Cassirer, “the essence of everything is contained in its name. The name of a thing and the thing itself are inseparably fused.”²¹ Elsewhere

20) Eliade, *Rites and Symbols of Initiation*, 28.

21) Cassirer, *The Philosophy*, 118, 89.

he notes the same tendency with regard to numbers.²² The name is a sign both of the spiritual entity and of the person named.

Reality is not “pure” and was never intended to be. We *intend* words to act like signs to their referents. We do not *intend* symbols to possess essence as between referent and symbol (we *do* expect varying degrees of similarity of the linguistic form and hence of meaning). No symbol logically does that, but every sign has the potential to have *homoiously* related denotative internal referents, presuming that the content between sign and referents is distinct in intensity, hue, and/or size. Words are different from other symbols despite sharing the logical relations from a purist standpoint. The word is, if not logically then by *feeling*, emblematic of its referent; it reveals the referent, and it is psychologically indexical to the referent. Given the word, whence the referent, therefore the sign.

It is in part because symbols generate implicit form that they are associated with form instead of content. (It is in part also because large collections of objects require expansion of a form to cover the whole, by which it is often identified, and third, the forms of symbol and referent, despite being *homoiousic*, are moderately different from one another in kind, size and/or magnitude.) Signs are associated with content since their *raison d’être* is to communicate the primary internal referent (which is content) by way of expressions essentially linked to that content, to the external referents for purposes of communication – of content. This is in addition to the four modes of comparison (hereinafter “sign functions”), each of which entails a comparison of content.

To summarize what has been presented: there are four modes of form to deal with. Two of them, the inherent and structural (linguistic), are common to sign and symbol. The background on the linguistic structure goes back to Wittgenstein, of which ours is an interpretative parallel (not precisely what Wittgenstein intended). “Perhaps the most fundamental thesis of Mr. Wittgenstein’s theory,” said Bertrand Russell, “is that in order that a certain sentence should assert a certain fact there must ... be something in common between the structure of the sentence and the structure of the fact.”²³ The interpretation is as follows: there must be something in common in the linguistic structure (form) between the indicator and referent of a sign or symbol.

One form, the implicit, is tied only and specifically to the symbol. It is what binds the indicator to the referent. *This act literally defines the linguistic form of the indicator as that of the referent.* In the sign, the sounds and letters bounded by form yield the content of the words we use to communicate meaning (content). The sign, accordingly, tends to be associated with content, and has no need of implicit form. In figure (2) inner circles represent inherent form. Sight, or any other mode resulting in understanding, carries the content relation across from the sign to the referent. It fills the distance gap. As mediators of content *they share in it*, whence the oval connecting indicator and referent in the figure. For *homoiousic* references see the next section. The fourth category of form, the core form (Wittgenstein’s “form of representation”) is dealt with later.

Fact, Relation, Form and Content

We continue with definitions by offering a pair of very rough-and-ready, essentially incomplete definitions which will be improved upon throughout the article.

- A *symbol* is an entity with a *form* in a *homoiousic* relation with its referent, which exists as a divergent mode of reality. The first entity may be said to be a symbol of the second. A *sign* is an entity whose *content* is *homoiousic* with the content of the referent entity which is a variant mode of reality from the first. The first entity may be seen as the sign of the second.

22) Ibid., 233.

23) Russell, “Introduction,” 8.

In qualifying relations of form or content as *homoiousic*, what form and content are we referring to? Perception and thought unite the sign's internal primary referent with its external referent to make a whole, maintaining the *homoiousic* relation, which is not an additional form but one that instead describes the degree of inherent connectedness that the relations of the emblematic, indexical, revelatory, and identificational functions have with the sign. In the case of symbolic relations, we have no real choice but to postulate that both the linguistic and implicit forms are established along with the naming of the referent are *homoiousic*, since the naming enables a common linguistic structure by fiat, and because a linguistic equivalence seems to meet the requirements of a *homoiousic* relation.

The symbol "black" is simply assigned (literally, marked, made a sign of) the primary internal referents which, variously by context include death, impurity, disease, and occasionally authority (the judge's robe, the philosopher's pallium). Indeed, it seems just like a sign, with a single internal referent, and exposed to all as a message. One can be forgiven for treating these instances as signs even though they are properly symbols, since signs are required by our definition to possess one or more of the four sign functions. The assignment presupposes the implicit form which in turn compels the commonality of linguistic form. Thus if the primary referent is death, the linkage automatically defines the color black as referring to death.

What is unique to *homoiousic* form and content is the assurance of added knowledge it brings consequent to relations between indicator and (external) referent. Structural (linguistic) form, implicit form, organized groups linked by inherent form, and the four categories of content similarity between sign and referent are each *homoiousic* by nature or by fiat. The degree of essentialist connectedness implied of the *homoiousic* relation naturally and necessarily births ideas and questions of complete, absolute, and/or spiritual identity, for example. These will lead to the complexities that symbols entertain, which of course goes to Langer's point. With her "presentational symbol"²⁴ she expresses much the same thing as the *homoiousic* effects of content sharing with content and form with form and the two with one another. Here is an example in which both signs and symbols generate questions and extend a dialogue beyond the context – the flag of the United States has 64 signs and 5 symbols. Colors are typically symbolic, but they can be signs as well if the context calls for it. In this case, each of the thirteen stripes represents, is a *sign* of, one of the thirteen colonies forming the union. The colors are, however, also the symbols we expect they are, the white for purity and innocence, red for hardiness and valor, and blue for vigilance, perseverance, and justice. Would we know this without being told? The flag as a whole symbolizes the nation as a whole and as an entity – the plurality as unity. The stars are likewise signs for the states; they are also known collectively (and correctly) as a *symbol* of the heavens and the goals to which humankind aspires – they together count as one symbol.

But how do these state symbols jibe with the representation of blue? Surely there is a relation between these signs and the symbol of their surround, and it certainly cannot be what we just said of the symbol blue. "What would it be?" is the natural question. Just as the blue must, by its placement as the surround for the stars, refer to the entirety of the United States – the totality of the states as a group – the stars now represent together a *constellation*. Would we have gathered this without assistance? The form of the flag with respect to the internal groupings and their forms, suggest the origination of the nation and the present status. "In what way?" we are tempted to ask. We cannot really say: perhaps it is summed up in the phrase *e pluribus unum*. "How does the blue internal referent relate to the white and red as a matter of content?" we also inquire. Perhaps the red and white are personal qualities whereas the blue represents the expected (or promised) governmental qualities. We do not know, but we will hazard our guesses, as the *homoiousic* character may suggest.

24) Langer, *Philosophy in a New Key*, 97. We think she would have been more complete and accurate calling them "presentational indicators," so as to denote both signs and symbols.

And what is the distinction between red and white as signs versus symbols? As symbols, their combined primary internal referents refer to *all* of the colonies; the blue applies to *all* of the states. The entire flag represents *all* of the form-content combinations of the denotative/primary internal referents. As signs, *each* formed stripe or star refers to a *single* entity (denotative referent), whether a state or colony and as signs they also express it to a multitude of onlookers. The blue square is emblematic of – a sign of – the stripes (and vice versa): the contents are different aspects of the same country or nation (the representations of the thirteen colonies are the “core form” of the entire sign relationship – see below). The whole flag as a sign designates the relation of colonies to states and vice versa. Analyzing the flag raised several questions that did not have clear answers (but various sources give their views, some based on documentary evidence – for example the statutes introducing and elaborating the national flag); not all objects come even close to offering answers.

Examining paintings by Robert Motherwell or Jackson Pollock raises questions that may well evade the attempt to offer a suitably rational answer. In fact, rational answers are likely beside the point. These painters invite unique but inexpressible notions. “For Langer, presentational symbols are what the arts give us, like dance, painting, and music. Such presentational symbols offer a significant form, that can provide knowledge, but a kind of knowledge not reducible to serially related, referred, and exclusively classed, parts.”²⁵ Or, as Langer has it, this kind of symbolism “is a non-discursive symbolism, peculiarly well suited to the expression of ideas that defy linguistic ‘projection.’”²⁶

Before continuing, we should add additional information about relations and facts since it seems likely that they are the precursors or first examples of what we know as signs and symbols. Relations and facts are both nameable (they refer to entities) and describable. Both are examples of the RIR schema. The relation, let us suppose, is a very primitive and simple but existent thing, merely a statement about orientation, composition, quality and/or interaction. The relation is describable as a “symbol” of those four elements with respect to the total number of substrates in the relation. It is the agglutination of content units to a symbolic grouping or whole that is afterwards referenced by its form, and by form we are brought back to the content available for use in a sign relation. This in a way ties together sign and symbol, illustrating the complex interaction of form and content.

As mentioned, the sign is tied far more to content than to form, and the concrete components of the relation are the content of that entity largely independent of its form (the exception is style). That we can speak of a relation rather than a *relationship* is because the relation is inchoate, not having demonstrated *consistent presence* and *durability* over time. Of course, we can speak of “momentary” relations, but I am referring to those that exist consistently even if momentary, or by artificial construction. A “relation-ship” presupposes just these additional (italicized) markers.

A fact, on the other hand, is perhaps just as well named as the guarantor of a fully legitimate relation – properly, a *relationship* (which I shall refer to simply as “relation” hereinafter) – and is describable as a “sign” of the relations’ content, with its valid actuality. We should add that the symbol is dependent upon the formal elements of one or more external entities. The form itself suggests presence and durability. This form can be abstracted from content in order to apply metaphysical rules to its existence and function. Form can also be abstracted from across the four categories of orientation, composition, quality, and interaction. The greater the consistency of form across these categories of relation, despite the permutations of relational content, the more specific and complete the form will be.

25) Kramer, *Intercultural Modes of Philosophy*, 8.

26) Langer, *Philosophy in a New Key*, 93.

The fact, being a sign, is dependent upon content that is similar between indicator and referent because the relation is indexical, revelatory, emblematic, and/or identificational largely independent of the existing commonality of form. It might be noted that for Peirce this relation of the emblematic exists whenever a sign functions as an icon, where it “may represent its object mainly by its similarity.”²⁷ His indexical sign functions as does the one here. He has no equivalent for the revelational functionality; many linguists consider that the identificational sign deals with the signifier-signified relation, as for example the rose (signifier) is a flower (signified).

Expressing the linguistic content of the fact provides the meaning, though it is the relation which suggests it. The fact, validating the relation with the evidence of consistent presence and durability, also validates the meaning. The definitions of relation and fact, primitive as they are, should suggest to us the criteria that we must apply in order to define and distinguish between the more sophisticated examples of symbol and sign.

It is at this point difficult to ignore the obvious question: “what is the content, and what evidence is there that the sign, and not the symbol, is so inextricably linked to it?” The content of a relation is immediately derived from the sign functions noted above. In the paradigm, content is located at Being and Reality, and forms at the other two. Being is active. So first of all, these refer to active processes. They are not passive relations. It is because a tornado sucks the bark off the tree that we see and this result as a sign of its action. The content of the revelation is an active uncovering of what was hidden or unrecognized. The emblematic relation actively identifies that the content of the referent is inextricably bound to the content of the sign. Suppose that pounding the table forcibly is a sign of anger. Because this is precisely what one immediately expects from anger, we as observers of the behavior naturally *identify* with the sign’s emblematic relation to anger. Psychologically, identification denotes a psychic closeness or emotional interaction with the stimulus which here is the relation between sign and referent.

Before going on, we can pose another, similar question: “can *forms* be emblematic, revelatory, indexical or identificational?” At first blush it might seem so. Indeed, symbols easily take on emblematic relationships that are form-based or “type one.” As for the others, the essence of form is nearly always to presuppose content. One can even say that the original content gives rise to the very form constituting the relation itself. As the *raison d’être* of the four sign functions is to reflect content itself, the answer to the question is limited to the formal emblem. The forms of symbol and referent, despite being *homoiousic*, are moderately different from one another in kind and/or size. Such distinctions make for the same in content which in turn can occasionally obviate the possibility of the emblem, index, revelation, or identification.

Form, Content, Sign and Symbol

Any sign whatsoever presupposes a correspondence of similitude between sign and referent. A warning sign on the highway is immediately processed as influencing our behavior in driving a vehicle. One does not have to warm up to the occasion as with many symbols (see below). The identification of message exchange between sign and ourselves (the external referents), is clear and immediate.

Implicit form seems a parallel to what Langer has established with her “significant form,” which unites all artistic realms, and which “really has significance.”²⁸ As for significance –

27) Peirce, *The Collected Papers*, 2.276. Eco says that the iconic sign could possess optic, ontological or conventionalized properties. I should think that the emblematic, revelatory, indexical, and identificational relations cover that territory and much more besides. See Eco, *A Theory of Semiotics*, 207.

28) Langer, *Feeling and Form*, 24.

We have here a principle of analysis ... wherein the several arts may be distinguished as well as connected, and almost any philosophical problems they present – problems of their relative values, their special powers or limitations, their social function, their connection with dream and fantasy or with actuality, etc., etc. – may be tackled with some hope of decision.²⁹

The present theory of implicit form does not pretend to all that Langer suggests of significant form, but neither is it devoid of significance. Implicit form assists in the understanding of various relations. Consider the archetype of a recursive vertical array of functions as described above in the metaphysics section. With each succeeding function the member corresponding to the archetypal Being must possess fundamental qualities of Being, and so on for the other three. What runs vertically through the array is *implicit form*. If we assume that at each move up the array a new symbol is created, then the implicit form is recreated at every successive function. There is no other existing form that could fulfill this.

Symbols are what they are in part because they relate to wholes, to all among a group, to pluralities existing as unities, to infinitudes, to conceptualizations, and to “type one” emblems. Extending throughout the wholes are forms. Where do they come from? They must exist either a priori, or arise from content, or come about from human artifice. For signs and symbols man determines content and its vagaries; form follows. But in a paradigm the content must follow the common form relating the placement back to its archetype in the same position. Observe this in the following cascade of functions:

- Sincerity, Prerogative, Stewardship, Office
- Father, Spirit, Son, God
- Will, Power, Obligation, Authority
- Essence, Being, Existence, Reality

The sincerity of the father reflects the will of Essence; the prerogative of the spirit reflects the power of Being; the stewardship of Christ reflects the obligation presenting as an Existence; the office of God reflects the authority of all Reality. The same syntactic structure through each expansion of the original archetype reflects the common implicit form running throughout the paradigm. The form of the general content – the rules governing the relations of content within each function – are the inherent form following on the content which manifests in the facticity and form of the function. Rules result in facts. Those rules outline the generation of Being and Existence from Essence, and their interaction to derive Reality.³⁰

Consider now the symbolic content of the color black when in opposition to white; black suggests to most people impurity and/or culpability, the state of being in the wrong.³¹ There is absolutely nothing that objectively relates a color to these descriptions. But, one might object, are not these colors examples of content? Yes, but the *way* the colors are being used *is* symbolic, after all. And in any case, black and white are too contrasting to admit any of the four sign functions that tie content together in the sign. The fact that they are both colors is immaterial. The freight train and the tricycle are both wheeled vehicles, a “named” class, but we would not be able to call one the sign of the other. The term that relates them is “analogy.”

In representational art the observer (consciously or not) compares the presentational content with an imagined original source (of objects) and consciously evaluates the meaning in the distinctions drawn in style. In abstract art the observer *arbitrarily* establishes both an internal referent and the implicit form. This is an example of the IO scenario.

29) Ibid.

30) For a full enumeration of the rules, see Herrman, “Secundum *De Officiis* Part I Metaphysics,” 10–11.

31) See Smith, “Color Explained.”

In art, representational and abstract modalities sponsor idea formation. But the same is true of class analysis. Cassirer's remarks below refer every bit as much to the sign as to the symbol, and in the case of the class, the relevance of the sign is especially marked since the title word is developed only *after* the awareness that a collection is made of similar items which by the inductive process of thought opens up the possibility of naming the group as a class with a title. The knowledge that each member shares something in common with an abstract equivalent is to say that each is a sign of this abstract essence, which ultimately drives the mind to create a title for the class. The conception of a sign in a fundamental sense precedes *and enables* the symbol: no sign, no symbol.

The logical concept not only asserts a coordination and affinity of contents, but inquiries into the "why" of this coordination, striving to apprehend its law and "foundation." Here analysis of the relations between concepts leads back ... to the statement of a *principle* out of which they can grow, from which they can be derived as its varieties.³²

Langer insists that the sign is a mere matter of recognition. This does not appear to be the case. Recognition is to identification what the relation is to the fact. Recognition says, oh, I know that I know about this. The identification says not only that I know, but that I have a special *feeling* about it. The sign offers the impression of validity of the relation with the sense that one is ready to defend that validity. This is why signs, far more than symbols, reflect authority and validity. In fact, signs can be said to reflect the origin of respect, regard, and reverence.

Signs bring us identifications, whereas symbols tend to rely on the projection, as the fact of an implicit form strongly suggests. At first (with some exceptions) symbols appear to retain psychological distance, acting more like recognizers, even when the ideal is to achieve a full-on psychic identification with the primary referent. Take, for an example, the scales of justice, which are a *sign* of fairness, where the relation is obvious and close. Used as a *symbol* of the legal system generally, we have a relation far more distant and disconnected from the indicator than is the sign. And to repeat, the scales are a symbol only when relating to the *entire system* of jurisprudence and procedure that make them possible in the first place.³³

Concepts, which Langer limits strictly to the symbol, can or at least should be, denotational referents for signs. Let us admit, symbols can be rich and complex in a way that few signs are. Langer believes that when we conceptualize we automatically and always generate symbols, that thinking in symbols brings advantages. (But we saw above that *primary* concepts are not associated with symbolization.)

Symbols can be mere recognitions. Consider the lotus petal, its primary referent indicating purity, enlightenment, self-regeneration, and rebirth (OIO). Here again, nothing objective links the symbol with its referent. The only content relation is due to the arbitrarily generated syntactic and implicit forms coexisting across the symbol and referent. There can be identification with the primary internal referent, but it is based not on an immediate gut reaction, but because of a consistent and emotional development evolving between symbol and referent. Prior to all this psychic interaction the referent-indicator relation is simple recognition. In any case, it is the internal referent (the meaning) which is supposed to be identified with, not so much the symbol. With signs, *they* are as much or more identified by an onlooker as are its referents. Langer would gladly put this statement to good use, arguing that the sign referent is precisely where you *do not* want attention to be in the first place. It is not as simple as that.

32) Cassirer, *The Philosophy*, 294.

33) "[Symbols] are not empty configurations. They show at least a vestige of natural connection between the signal and its signification. For instance, our symbol of justice, the scales, could hardly be replaced by a chariot." Saussure misses the point that the sign plays a part in this "symbol." See de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, 68.

The Class

Most, though hardly all, symbols derive from class concepts. While this may appear contrived, it is far from an “outlier” notion. Habermas: “Let R be a rule, and $m, n, q \dots$ be symbolic expressions that can count as instances of R in a given context.”³⁴ Here the context is, of course, the class. The class label presupposes the “rule,” which can be defined as “the factual content constitutive of the very substantial regularity of meeting an expectation.”³⁵

The content of each class member is by definition emblematic (“type two”) of the class title, reinforcing the legitimacy of the sign. The title as symbol “occurs in its simplest form,” notes Cassirer, “where language characterizes groups of different words as a unit by marking them with a common suffix or prefix ... which discloses its relation to other words.”³⁶ In our view, however, the true symbol is arrived at only when the title is a separate term representing the group. This in turn introduces two modes of abstraction: one where the group is abstracted from the title, and the other where the title is abstracted from the group. The first is deductive, the second inductive. Classes are conceptual and are usually derived from groups of either primitives or other concepts. The derivation is an inductive abstraction. “The class ... is not a *list of* formal items but an *abstraction* from them.”³⁷

Of course we can say that inherent form drapes the entire class. Habermas comments on this form as follows:

Only values that can be abstracted and *generalized* into principles, internalized largely as *formal* principles, and applied *procedurally*, have so intensive a power to orient action that they can cut across various particular situations and, in the extreme case, systematically penetrate all spheres of life and bring an entire biography, or even the history of social groups, under a unifying idea.³⁸

What about words like animal, plant, machine, and so forth? The first two can be conceived as a class with membership. These are titled classes. If the word is alone and unique, identified by a helper such as “this” or “this or that particular” animal or plant or machine, it should want to call for the sign, not the symbol. In other words, when the indicator is a sign, it is inherently related to a *specific* referent by one or more of the four sign functions. The third group is not strictly a class; we have labelled it a “quasi-class.” Further, the name is not in this case a symbol of the aggregate. Members of the class (motorized toy cars, *garbage trucks*, electric drills and saws, washing machines) would not necessarily consider themselves signs of the label, though strictly speaking they are. They would more likely see themselves as an example of others of their own kind (*garbage trucks*, panel trucks, 18-wheelers, etc.). Despite being concepts, the word “machine” and all the names of the academic disciplines, for example, are identificational signs.

If the conditions exist for applying either sign or symbol, what cannot be a sign is more than likely going to be a symbol. However, it need not always be; some elements of reality have relations that are inappropriate

34) Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action*, vol. 2, 18.

35) The empirically valid reality that X is indexical to Y over time; in this instance, that the particular class label is an abstraction from, a symbol of, its own primitives or concepts for all times and circumstances, with all of its logical ramifications. *Labelling* the class implies an intersubjective relationship; experiencing and applying the rule does *not*. The rule is a relation validated as a fact, a relation where the subject initially desires, but comes from experience to expect that, say, her wail, reflexive to an imprinted or instinctive reaction, will be responded to in such or so manner and which is observed as likewise for others. This expectation, a relation validated as factual, *is* the rule, which any subject will experience for herself (contra Wittgenstein: one need not have to *think* of a rule to experience and follow one – *Phil. Invest.* [Anscombe], 81, [202]), but will receive a label and appropriate explication *inter pares* (intersubjectively, via language). Note that this implies metaphysical realism. The *relation*, accepted as *factual*, implies reality.

36) Cassirer, *The Philosophy*, 292.

37) de Joia and Stenton, *Systemic Linguistics*, 6.

38) Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action* vol. 1, 171–72.

for either or signs or symbols – any relation within the same mode of reality, for example. Computers are not signs or symbols of other computers or computer equipment. Typewriters have no sign or symbol to apply to computer keyboards. Plenty of words exist to describe these basic sorts of relations: analogy and parallel come to mind.

The Examples

Here, from Peirce, is a mathematical example of commonality in a relation between indicators and their referents: “this equation ... and the conventions of algebra ... establish a relation between the *very* letters $f[1]$, $f[2]$, $f[o]$ regardless of their significance, the form of which relation is the *Very Same* as the form of the relation between the three focal distances that these letters denote. This is a truth quite beyond dispute.”³⁹ The internal referents consist of the conventions of algebra, and the focal distances. The two distinct facets are indicator (the letters) and object, making this compatible with the OIO scenario. The letter “ f ” is a *symbol* of *any or all* of the given focal distances, and there is no objective relation between the indicator and its referent. The letters each denote “function,” which the referents in fact are, thus satisfying the requirement that indicator and object are “structurally” equivalent (linguistically).

* * *

The international *symbol* for “do not smoke” is a red circle with an oblique line dividing the circle in half, which symbolizes *all* that “do not” can extend to. The symbol and its external referent are of course in different modes of reality, while structurally (linguistically) similar. The obvious reason that this indicator is a symbol is that its form has no earthly relation to any possible background sign (below) to which its meaning refers. Here the entirety is a “complex” symbol (OMIO) containing one symbol and one sign. Thus, for example, it can and often does use the background of a likeness to a cigarette which serves as a *sign* of the actual cigarette, or also the act of smoking. Of course, the represented cigarette is an altered mode of reality from the real thing.

Despite a difference in the mode of reality, the sign and its referent (the cigarette) are entirely too similar to permit use of a symbol, which calls for moderate differences (of the form in particular) between two objects, one of which is intended to be the symbol of the other. Furthermore, the *symbol* in the complex could itself be taken for a sign – think of the connotative qualities of a stop sign (color and shape) – which applies to innumerable external referents, thus validating use of the sign. The would-be sign *exists as* a symbol. And yet, as we have already seen, the symbol can *exist as* a sign, and function as one, wherever it is posted. Most relevant, however, this would-be sign accepts an inexhaustible *plurality* of other possible *internal* denotational referents, which a sign practically never does. In addition, the symbol is arbitrary and works strictly through form, not with other indications like the content of writing. In the end, this is assuredly a symbol, never mind that it (along with most signs) carries its message to an “open” set of external referents.

* * *

Affect is the outer visage of an internal state. Suppose that a flushed face is known to be the affect of shame, for which it is a revelatory sign. In fact, looking downward – and every other behavior associated with shame – is a revelatory sign of shame. Shame has this group of phenomena as its primary internal referent; its external referent includes those witnessing the act producing the shame. As with any sign there is a very tight

39) Peirce, *The Collected Papers*, 4.530.

relation, often of psychic identification between the indicator and external referent. As Sartre put it, “thus shame is shame *of oneself before the Other*; these two structures are inseparable.”⁴⁰

The content of looking down is *homoiousic* with the content expected of shame, since the same internal physiology accounts for both. Similar contents are originally known by a similarity of contexts, the sharing of a common source or cause, or of a common event. Such is the loss of bark from a tornado, whose content is owing to an event common to both entities in shared time and space.

* * *

Gestures are intended to communicate, a trait shared with language generally. They are often an example of an ObsObs scenario. Gestures are said to employ either information or communication, roughly reflecting Langer’s distinction between sign and symbol, respectively. She takes this analogy too far, but as for gestures she has a valid point with one prominent exception. Informative gestures are in fact signs but, contrary to her view, signs are common also with communicative gestures, as in sign language. Many communicative gestures are, however, truly symbolic.

Extending an olive branch is a gesture of good will. The extended arm and the olive branch (or something symbolizing it) are together the symbol, the indicator. This is the O-I/O scenario, where the indicator *exists as* the observer. The object (here the external referent) of the symbol is the person being assuaged. Its internal primary referent is something along the lines of reconciliation, agreeing to a truce, or the understanding of the other’s position. There is no naturally occurring relation whatever between an olive branch and good will, but there *is* a commonality of implicit *homoiousic* form and common linguistic statement between the indicator and external referent. The external referent is in a different mode of reality from the olive branch. For all these reasons it is distinctly a symbol. Were a person to extend a hand to an old enemy or present a white flag at war, an observer might well say that the gesture is an olive branch, which in this use is a metonym.

* * *

Umberto Eco recounts seeing his four-year-old son stomach down on the dining table, spinning himself while shouting, “I’m a helicopter!”⁴¹ His gesturing is the indicator, which *symbolizes* not just a helicopter, but *any and all* helicopters (the referents). Symbol and referent are modally different, and the labelling of the helicopter as a referent of the gesturing created a *homoiousic* formal relation in terms of which the linguistic structural relation must comport. There is no content in common between symbol and referent, with the exception of a “type two” emblem – the boy’s gesturing. This plays to the sign, but is the only evidence in the sign’s favor. With every other piece of evidence pointing to the symbol, that will settle the matter. The size and kind differentials are again quite apparent. Had the child said simply, “I’m a rotor,” he would indeed, ideally, have been the *sign* of a rotor.

* * *

In the sentence “the ship plows the sea” we have a metaphor to examine (OIO). The word “plows,” in turning over ground, is *symbolic* of the prow of a ship turning over water. The mechanism of the metaphor consists in the use of one (form of prow) of two divergent forms to have the same effect on its own linked content

40) Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 222. Original emphasis.

41) Eco, *A Theory of Semiotics*, 206.

(water) as the other form (plow) on its content (ground). Why is the word “plows” symbolic of the similar effect by a related but very different object? It is the “local” *form* common to the two objects – the plowshare and prow as the “active” parts of otherwise very different wholes – that is immediate and necessary to the effect being symbolized. This is an instance of form being emblematic in the “type one” sense, involving say, a yacht and a common plow. The relevant aspect is the relation of plowshare to prow, in short, the formal relation. This generates the emblematic “type one” relation.

The relevant relation of content is that the ground and water share a common form. Here there is no basis for either sign or symbol; the relation is one of analogy. Though the plowshare and prow are too similar to hold a symbolic relation, the real forms that count are the full boat and plow, easily of sufficient difference. The *imposing* yacht assures the emblematic relation; but it is imposing not because of its size or expense but because a boat is so totally different from a plow. It sticks out like a rare phenomenon.

* * *

The Jaguar car hood ornament is a *symbol*; it is evidently different in mode from its referent, the actual cat; it has nothing whatsoever in common with its primary referent – sleekness, swiftness, and power. There are no indications why it might be a sign, therefore it is a symbol as the facts suggest. It has two external referents; the car and the observer. But the purpose of the hood ornament is to impute its primary referent upon the external car, so its relation with the car is what concerns us. We are led to suppose the observer to be the author in this function, and as such it must be the designer of the car. The car is now a work of art, the designer’s intent being the internal connotative referent – the selfsame qualities as above; the car is the indicator, and the observers are those interested in purchasing the car. That the car is the sign of a vehicle does not influence anything here. The internal connotative referent by intent is sleekness, swiftness, and power. The hood ornament therefore symbolizes not only its own primary referent, but as well what the designer intends for the car. Since this, too, is by design of the artist, the analysis is complete.

* * *

A cigarette and cigar can be said to be emblematic of one another still, neither the sign nor the symbol applies; they are analogous only. The garage door is emblematic of a front door given that they function each as an entryway. Is either symbolic of the other? Signs of one another? There *is* a structure in the functionality of each door. But if the doors are signs of anything they are signs of people going in and out. Are they sufficiently different to permit symbolization? The doors are so close in concept, structure, and function as to rule out symbolization entirely. In the “two door scenario” we cannot even argue any difference in the mode of reality, let alone differences of form when it is dominated by identical functions, which naturally imply similarity of form, if by distinct mechanisms. The doors are merely analogous to and with one another.

* * *

Susanne Langer argues that what we see is often wrong, as in the case of a Mercator projection in which the regions approaching the poles represent land masses as being far larger than they are in actuality. This makes for an especially intriguing example for analysis. Is a Mercator projection a sign or symbol of its referent? To be either of these we of course have need of Wittgenstein’s similarity of structure. That is clearly not an issue. The innumerable geographical boundaries of reality are more or less well reflected in the indicator and demonstrate inherent form in common between indicator and referent. This being the case their linguistic representa-

tions will be identical or nearly so. For a sign we need *homoiousic* content that has transitioned to a new mode of reality, and for a symbol we require that as well as a significant form discrepancy whereby inherent form is nonetheless *homoiousic* between indicator and referent.

It is the very fact of the Mercator's bloated masses and widespread inaccuracy that makes a difference in the form-content relation of sufficient import to qualify as a fulfilled criterion of a symbol. That the very essence of the projection is to exaggerate the form-content relation between picture and reality lends credibility to the symbol. Of course, there is a general similarity of content, and it exists across a mode of reality, denoted by change from the empirical to the artificial printed paper. The set-up seems perfectly suited to the sign function. And indeed it is a sign function *as well as* a symbolic one (RIR/RIR).

* * *

Our last example comes from an anthropological study of Sinai Bedouin. The topic here is the concept of honor. This is one of very few concepts that is at once sign and symbol. It is a *sign* of dignity; it is a *symbol* of *all* that comports with repute and esteem (RIR/RIR). On a superficial broad sweep, we recall an important and commonly observed difference between sign and symbol: signs refer to few or just one *internal* referent; symbols, while they *can* denote a single internal referent, more often refer to a plurality of them – sometimes a very large plurality indeed, as when a symbol's denotative referent is a class with innumerable members.

Dignity, though a concept, is a unit and identifies with two classes of internal referent: the source and expression of worth and right. That is it. There is nothing more to the concept that does not reduce to this description. Most traditional cultures have no word specific to dignity and some are without a word even for honor, though this is rare. The Bedouin are one of the few that have both. The Bedouin word for honor is '*ird*. There is another word, *wajh*, which means "face," both the actual real face and face as it relates to honor. The important point is just what the relation with honor entails.

Specifically, it entails dignity: "'Face,' unlike '*ird*, seems to be viewed as something of which a man cannot be stripped,"⁴² reports Frank Henderson Stewart. It is also true that you can lose some dignity *without* also sacrificing honor. "If ... you gain the reputation of being too quick to give way, then you may find people begin to transgress against you in various ways because they believe they can do so with impunity; but this need not affect your '*ird*."⁴³ In fact, he continues, "I shall refer to these non-'*ird* offences against honor as *affronts to dignity*."⁴⁴ I have elsewhere referred to dignity as the backbone of honor and of honor as the face of dignity.⁴⁵ Nothing in Stewart's explication suggests that I should rethink this point.

In short, honor is intimate with dignity though still discreet. Part of the *content* of honor is in fact dignity, and vice versa, as we expect, but with an important proviso: dignity is actually a *symbol* referring not just to honor, but *far beyond*. Honor and dignity, as symbols, both have a multitude of internal referents (when the basic concepts are opened to their full membership) and their meanings collectively extend to even more external referents. When we say that honor is a sign of dignity we are saying in effect that it is the sign of a symbol. The sign denotes a singularity which as a symbol opens up to innumerable internal referents.

42) Stewart, *Honor*, 99.

43) *Ibid.*, 100.

44) *Ibid.* Original Emphasis.

45) Herrman, "What Is Dignity?" 103–26, 111.

The Form of Representation (Core Form)

Wittgenstein: “we make to ourselves pictures of facts. In the picture and the pictured there must be something identical in order that the one can be a picture of the other at all. What the picture must have in common with reality in order to be able to represent it after its manner – rightly or falsely – is its form of representation.”⁴⁶

To be a sign or symbol seems to require three presuppositions. These items summarize the *criteria* by which any sign or symbol can exist as such; any differentiae added to these are incorporated to obtain finalized definitions of the words:

- Core representation common to indicator and referent (applies mainly to signs)
- Over-arching syntactic form (structure) common to indicator and referent
- Altered mode of reality between indicator and referent

We have dealt elsewhere with the matter of linguistic form and the modes of reality. What we need to investigate, therefore, is just what this “representation” entails as between the reality and the representation of it in the picture. We want to characterize what constitutes the “identical” aspect in common between the two modes of reality (actual and representational).

The simplest, almost too simple, example of a core form finds that *abc* in the following series is the core form of *dmabc*, *ftoabc*, *hkabcpl*, *abcufpabc*. Translated to the relation or fact, we have orientation, composition, quality and interaction to work with. Orientation is what it is; its presence in reality will be the same as a snapshot of it presented to the mind. The general procedure for obtaining the core relation from the other three will be discussed below.

We begin with a mental picture as mentioned by Wittgenstein above. By definition, this requires an authorial entity responsible for generating the picture. Here is the function –

- Author, Signifier, Signified, Sign (or Symbol)

By way of example, consider two objects that are represented in the mental picture of an observer. What we see and what we cognize are typically two different though related things. When we visualize a man we do so with clothes on, for example. The clothes and body together we can call a *depiction*. We also know it as a gestalt. *Natural* modifications of this gestalt, such as a distinctly aquiline nose, or a humpback, and so forth, are “features.” If they are added *artificially*, they are “stylistic” elements. If the entire picture is stylized, the picture is either an aesthetic presentation or it is an “artform.” An artform presupposes at least some aesthetic content; aesthetic presentations taken to a perfected state may constitute of themselves an artform.⁴⁷

We now invent a heuristic reality in which two individuals are playing a board game with pieces of jade on one side and onyx on the other. One has a green uniform, the other a white uniform. Of the two players one is brown skinned and speaks Spanish; the other is Caucasian and speaks Spanish with slow deliberative efforts. Each player is drinking something from a glass. One of the men has an aquiline nose. Then we begin to abstract everything. We first abstract each of our two personae. Imagine now that we can examine these in close-up. There are medallions on each uniform, one with a purple heart, and with additional information from the outside we deduce that one is a marine and the other a sailor. One of the men wears tattoos. We discover that one has a limp, having been injured in battle. Next we abstract the board and pieces and learn

46) Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, 2.1, 2.161, 2.17.

47) Some will object that all of aesthetics is art. Well, when virtually everything is art, what is art, after all? Parallel lines made up pretty are aesthetic; they are not art (unless an excuse is available for accepting it as abstract art).

that this game is actually chess. From all of these observations we abstract and delete all features and stylistic presentations.

We obtain the following:

Two human beings sit on chairs, and play a board game at a table while drinking a beverage.

This sentence carries the form in common between the reality and the picture. *The only features allowed in this formal presentation were those external to the two people.* The form of representation of Wittgenstein is known as a *syntagma* in Barthes' approach;⁴⁸ the long description prior, from which the abstraction leads to the core form, is called the *system*, which in this instance would be "a couple of men playing a game." Eco calls the form of representation the *nominal essence*, as contrasted with the *individual essence* from which the former is abstracted.⁴⁹

Using the abstractive method of arriving at the core form, we see this as the guarantee that whatever the picture contains, it is grounded with the core representation, thus satisfying Wittgenstein's principle. The observer can leave the core form as it is, lacking the features and stylistic elements in the actual reality, or can build onto the core form without altering it but adding various new features and stylistic elements. Said Peirce, "it [the sign] addresses somebody, that is, creates in the mind of that person an equivalent sign, or perhaps a more developed sign."⁵⁰ So it is.

Conclusion

Everything considered, we wistfully recall Hjelmslev who, fifty years ago, wrote that words are "minimal permutable signs."⁵¹ And Saussure: "[language] is a system of signs in which the one essential is the union of sense and sound pattern, both parts of the sign being psychological."⁵² "If all culture," writes Cassirer, "is manifested in ... specific symbolic forms, the aim of philosophy is not to go behind all these creations, but rather to understand and elucidate their basic formative principle."⁵³ We must respectfully disagree. It is science which understands and elucidates natural laws (and principles). It is philosophy that "goes behind" reality to identify and explicate the principles that matter. It might have to employ every sub-discipline of philosophy to achieve the goal, not excluding metaphysics, but it will try mightily.

We consider the upshots of this paper to be threefold: first, the sign would be more useful if it were used in accord with the arguments advanced herein; second, credible signs should be respected, perhaps even revered, if the right belief systems are to be found or buttressed; and third, symbols should be generated for important purposes with a stress on recasting the primary and denotative referents in the garb of regard. It is too simplistic to promote thinking in symbols with no other objective to guide their purpose and function.

With respect to Langer and her generally remarkable and practical insights, her thesis regarding signs and symbols reduces to three points: all concepts presuppose symbology (analysis suggests this as not totally correct); symbols are to be preferred over signs – to the extent this reflects the potential of sacral symbols to exert a positive influence, we do heartily agree; and third, symbols should – by choice and disposition – be discovered or identified, and put to use (analysis suggests this to be an unwise use of the sacral symbol). In fairness, it has been my objective to avoid overstating the case.

48) Barthes, *Elements of Semiology*, 62–63.

49) Eco, *A Theory of Semiotics*, 166.

50) Peirce, *The Collected Papers*, 2.228.

51) Hjelmslev, *Prolegomena to a Theory of Language*, 135. My emphasis.

52) Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, 14–15.

53) Cassirer, *The Philosophy*, 113.

It may be thought that we have added unnecessary complexity in the attempt to be thorough. But this impression is more than likely due to the several examples given and the complexity they raise, in order to illustrate basic points that apply as well to far simpler cases. If we have carelessly caused needless confusion with the RIR schema and the six scenarios, four forms, four referent classes, four sign functions, and seven symbolic functions, we sincerely apologize.

In the end, what amazes is the adaptability that human minds possess to so often correctly utilize what is otherwise so difficult to explain. It is hoped that the results of this analytic effort prove worthwhile in the search for ultimate answers to the many and diverse questions surrounding the use of sign and symbol.

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