Psychosemiotics: communication as psychological action

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STATEMENT OF AUTHENTICATION

The work presented in this thesis is, to the best of my knowledge and belief, original except as acknowledged in the text. I hereby declare that I have not submitted this material, either in whole or in part, for a degree at this or any other institution.

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ABSTRACT

The investigation of semiosis calls for an interdisciplinary approach. A realist logical framework emphasising the triadic nature of semiosis is the optimal foundation for critically examining and integrating aspects of quantitative psychology, the interpretative-qualitative tradition in the social sciences, structuralist semiotics, and functional-contextual semiotics. While several aspects of each of these fields can be successfully integrated into a psychosemiotic model, each also suffers from key conceptual flaws which need to be addressed as a prerequisite to an interdisciplinary approach. The structuralist school of semiotics—and the functionalist approaches that have evolved from it—show problematic tendencies to reduce the triadic relationship of semiosis to relationships within systems of signifiers. On the other hand, mainstream schools of psychology, with their narrow commitment to the operationalisation and quantification of variables, leave little room for the qualitative concept of semiosis. Moreover, the phenomenon of intentional action, which is crucial in understanding semiosis, is ignored or marginalised in both mainstream psychology and the qualitative-interpretative traditions of the social sciences. Mainstream psychology marginalises intentional action in favour of observable behaviour. The qualitative-interpretative tradition marginalises intentional action in favour of situational conventions governing action. In the psychosemiotic model that emerges from an engagement with these problems, semiosis is an intentional action that can be investigated in a scientific framework where the contextual factors of culture, social structure and social situation are taken into account. The descriptive and explanatory powers of the psychosemiotic model can be illustrated with analyses of specific cases of semiotic action in social and cultural contexts.
The use of signifiers, or sign vehicles such as stop signs, involves an irreducible triadic relationship. Semiosis involves a person using a signifier, or system of signifiers such as language, to refer to a state of affairs or to achieve a meaning-related interpersonal or interpretative goal. The core of semiosis has been conceptualised using a family of concepts such as representation and substitution. Eco (1976) states that “a sign is everything which can be taken as significantly substituting for something else” (p. 7).

Sless (1986) talked about the stand for relationship, where one thing is (more or less arbitrarily) deemed, by an individual or group, to represent something else. Once something is deemed or taken to stand for something else, it becomes a signifier. The signifier can then be used in communication or some other meaning-related goal. The triadic nature of semiosis—epitomised by the example of x deeming y to stand for z and then using y to achieve a communication-related goal—highlights that semiosis is a form of action.

The triadic nature of semiosis is also emphasised by Pelc (1988) who notes that expressions such as “a sign denotes something” or “a sign expresses something” have to be considered “as metaphorical and elliptical, standing in place of ‘P uses something at time t to denote (express) something else’ or ‘at time t, P uses something in order to learn (acquire knowledge about or familiarity with) something else’” (p. 319). P’s use of a signifier to achieve a meaning-related objective, or to learn about something, may be facilitated by semiotic conventions. These conventions are a vehicle of P’s actions and are therefore important in explaining P’s actions. However, an explanation of P’s communicative behaviour cannot be based on an analysis of conventional rules alone.

While it is possible, for the purpose of analysis, to focus on one aspect of signification rather than another, this cannot negate the triadic nature of signification. For example, Rauch (1986) argues that within the field of semiotics, there are trends which emphasise either the systemic-conventional aspects of signs or those which emphasise sign users’ transactions with these systems. The
systemic-conventional aspect, which Rauch (1986) calls “systematic”, is also known as the semiotic code. The transactional aspect consists of individuals’ interactions with, or uses of, the code. Rauch argues that these aspects are complementary:

Most of the conceptions of semiotics (and semiology) can be reduced to the relative importance given to the main aspects of the sign: its systematic, structural side, i.e., signification, or its transactional aspect, i.e., communication. . . . The two viewpoints are, of course, complementary and not in opposition, though this has often been attempted. (Rauch, 1986, p. 895)

Rauch adds that while the internal workings of semiotic systems are often described in terms of minimally distinctive features, such features “necessarily participate in a triadic act” (p. 917). Unfortunately, even approaches such as linguistic pragmatics, which do emphasise the transactional nature of semiosis, generally neglect psychology. Cummings (2005) notes that apart from the notable exception of Sperber and Wilson (1986), few practitioners of pragmatics have even attempted to integrate pragmatics and psychology.

Nor has a triadic conceptualisation of the sign found a home in the discipline of psychology. While the quantitative-empirical approach that dominates modern psychology has much to offer, one of its limitations is that it neglects constructs that are not readily measured. In this tradition of psychology, central phenomena, such as cognition and action tend to be operationalised into a stimulus-response, or input-output format. While behavioural approaches marginalise the mental processes that subserve semiosis, cognitive approaches inspired by the computer information processing metaphor often focus on models of the physiological process that are required for cognition rather than on cognition itself.

Mainstream semiotics, to the extent that it marginalises the semiotic agent, is also not conducive to the study of semiosis. A common trend in semiotics, particularly in formalist approaches such as the “structuralist” approach inspired
by the linguist Ferdinand de Saussure, is to circumscribe the sign user. *Functionalist* approaches, such as the social semiotics inspired by the linguist M.A.K. Halliday, do acknowledge the transactional nature of semiosis but paint a rather spartan picture of the subject doing the transacting. Functionalist semioticians examine the subject of semiosis from the point of view of categories of action facilitated by semiotic resources. Thus, in Halliday’s framework, the subject is one who can accomplish *interpersonal* or *ideational* (cognitive) goals commonly enabled by semiotic systems. The subject can also utilise *cohesive* (grammatical) resources which in turn facilitate interpersonal and ideational semiotic goals. While such an approach represents an advance from more formalist approaches, there is still very little consideration of how psychological aspects of subjects, such as beliefs, values and motivations, might interact with semiotic resources.

Bell (2002) has suggested that the transactional aspect of semiosis, because it focuses on the subject, belongs to the field of psychology, rather than to semiotics:

Both methodologically and empirically, ‘subjectivity’ is not a necessary substantive concept for an adequate semiotics. As a corollary, semiotic accounts of individual ‘subjectivities’ are empirically inadequate and frequently circular. (p. 215)

He noted there was a considerable amount of misguided psychologising in semiotics, along the lines, for example, of subjects being constructed by semiotic systems. One *reductio ad absurdum* of such a system-focused approach to the subject includes the:

Confusions that would arise from using the term “subjectivity” in the context of bilingualism. Would it follow that, if subjectivity is semiologically determined, and if one uses two “languages”, one is a “split”, or “dual” subject? Obviously, to be bilingual, is not to be two Lacanian[-style]… subjects. (p. 216)
Bell argues that the way forward for semiotics is to steer clear of mentalistic concepts and separate the notion of the *psychological subject* from the *subjective positions* afforded by texts:

> Psychological subjects (people who ‘use’ semiosis but are not all and only semiotic phenomena!) need to be distinguished from the positions in verbal/visual (or other) texts that are implied for ‘them’ (cf. imply ‘them’). The latter are so-called ‘subject-positions’. (2002, p. 210)

Thus, in Bell’s view, semiotics has room for specifically semiotic concepts of “subject-ness-in-general” or “subjecthood”. Since these categories are abstractions of “a person’s ability to use the first-person pronoun in discourse” (2002, p. 215), however, it would be difficult to quarantine these concepts from the psychological domain.

Bell speaks of subject positions as a property of texts, or perhaps as a product of a semiotic process. Whatever the case may be, the subject positions that Bell refers to ultimately involve a process such as one social group using the semiotic resources at their disposal to create texts with the aim of influencing another social group to adopt a particular position. In other words, subject *positions* in discourse are the outcome of social and psychological processes of *positioning*. Moreover, the notion of positioning only makes sense if we can compare the position offered to a social group or person with the empirical and therefore psychological reality of that group or person. An analysis of an aspect of Kress and van Leeuwen’s (1996) system of visual semiotics can be used to develop this point.

Kress and van Leeuwen demonstrate how the semiotic resource of vertical angle provides parameters for the interpretation of the meanings relating to interpersonal power in visual images. This concept can be illustrated with the two Gauguin paintings in Figure 1. The painting reproduced on the left, *(The Offering, 1902)* places the reader in a more “dominant” position because the women are depicted from a relatively higher perspectival angle than the women in the
painting on the right (*Two Tahitian Women*, 1899). In other words, the women in the painting on the right are depicted in a more “egalitarian” position, when it comes to the vertical angle of perspective.

**Figure 1: Vertical camera angle and interpersonal meaning.**

Bell argues for a distinction between the range of subject positions given in messages and the manner in which actual subjects respond to the positions given to them in textual manifestations of these systemic options. Thus, not all magazine readers will actualise the “submissive” interpretive potential of an image containing a person depicted from a high angle. Nor will readers necessarily experience “egalitarian” interpretive resonances when presented with an image of a person depicted from an eye-level point of view.

Bell’s conclusion implies that the study of “subject positions” can be confined to semiotics while the investigation of real subjects’ responses to these textual messages falls into the domains of psychology or perhaps psychosemiotics:

If we are only using the word ‘subject’ to mean ‘particular psychological entity’, we have moved out of the realm of semiotics, beyond pragmatics even, into either common sense psychology or ‘depth psychology’. And here it would be preferable to acknowledge that we are dealing with
psychological questions rather than, or as well as, semiotic questions. (p. 216)

Extra semiotic phenomena, however, are inextricably implicated in the resources of meaning-making, including the subject positions that Bell discusses. The very identification of a position as “dominant” suggests a psychological basis for the position. The dominant position offered to the viewer of an image framed in a high-perspective angle is a reflection of the extra-semiotic association between height, dominance and power. Given extra-semiotic influences such as these, it follows that explanations (as distinct from descriptions) of semiotic resources would rely on disciplines such as sociology and psychology to a greater extent than is acknowledged by Bell.

In contrast to Bell, Petocz (2004) argued that a complete semiotics needs a psychological focus. She described the conceptual preconditions for any theory of meaning or mind as follows:

“Meaning is a _three term relation_ , holding between signifier/symbol, a signified/symbolised, and a person for whom the signifier stands for the signified. Each of these terms is necessary for any instance of meaning. This relational nature of meaning is an important point about the _logic of meaning_. It follows that meaning cannot be a thing, cannot be intrinsic, cannot be a property, cannot be reduced to just one of the terms, and cannot be converted into a mere binary relation. . . . Among the logical constraints the most important is that meaning is a relation which requires as one of its terms a _cognising_ organism . . . It is a point of logic about meaning that every theory of meaning must be a _psychological_ theory. Meaning, therefore, is parasitic on cognition, which itself may be shown to be not an internal, private state in the Cartesian theatre, but a _two-term relation_ between an organism and its environment. (p. 23)

In her extended analysis of symbolism, Petocz (1999) notes three key logical constraints that follow from the triadic conceptualisation:

(i) firstly, the three-term relation cannot be presented as, or converted into, a two-term relation, by collapsing any of the two terms, particularly, as does happen, by collapsing the signifier and the signified; (ii) secondly, because meaning is a relation (X ‘means’ Y to A—the symbol ‘means’ the symbolised to the person), meaning requires each of the three terms, and
cannot therefore be a property or quality of any one of them; (iii) thirdly, the symbolised must exist independently of its role in signification, i.e., it must have intrinsic properties which are neither created nor changed by the signifier, or by the fact that it is signified. Its ontological status is no different from the ontological status of the symbol. (1999, p. 242)

While it is possible to focus on one or more of the three elements that constitute signification as a methodological strategy, the other elements cannot be conceptually excised. Morris (1946), for example, drawing on the work of Rudolph Carnap, distinguished between syntactics, semantics, and pragmatics as subfields devoted to different aspects of the triadic sign relationship:

Pragmatics is that portion of semiotic which deals with the origin, uses, and effects of signs within the behaviour in which they occur; semantics deals with the signification of signs in all modes of signifying; syntactics deals with combinations of signs without regard for their specific significations, or their relation to the behaviour in which they occur. (p. 219)

But Morris also adds that “it is more important to keep in mind the field of “semiotic”, as he called it, as a whole, and to bring to bear upon specific problems all that is relevant to their solution” (p. 219) and therefore it is necessary to emphasise “the unity of semiotic rather than break each problem” into its pragmatic, semantic, and syntactic components” (p. 219).

The work of Sperber and Wilson (1986) certainly demonstrates the need to “keep in mind the field of semiotics as a whole”. These authors argue that complex forms of meaning and communication are built on semantically and syntactically-focused processes of conventional encoding-decoding and the more pragmatically oriented process of inference. For example, an utterance such as “Your work performance has regularly reached a satisfactory level” can be taken as an insult or as praise depending on the recipient’s inference of the utterer’s intention in a particular social context. Thus even straightforward examples of communication involving conventional codes have a psychological aspect.
Sperber and Wilson (1986) emphasise the psychological aspects of the communicator’s *use* of the tacit communicative rules first explicated by Grice (1975). Grice identified several rules or “maxims” of cooperation stemming from the “cooperative principle”, or the normative demand to:

> Make your conversational contribution such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged. (Grice, 1975, p. 45)

When a communicator breaks or bends the cooperative principle, the violation can provide information which the audience can use to infer the communicator’s intentions and, more generally, the communicator’s state of mind. In the following exchange, for example, Bill violates the cooperative principle by not being forthcoming about the precise details of his salary:

Jane: How much money do you earn?
Bill: Let’s just say that I am reasonably financially comfortable.
Jane: Oh, sorry, I didn’t mean to pry.

In this example, Jane probably infers that Bill is uncomfortable in answering a personal question because he deliberately fails to supply the information that Jane has requested. Bill’s violation of the basic conversational principle of cooperativeness can be described in more specific terms, as a violation of one or more of the maxims following from the cooperative principle. The maxims relevant to the present discussion are the conversational maxims of quantity which Grice (1975) formulated as follows:

1. Make your contribution as informative as is required.
2. Do not make your contribution more informative than is required.

Bill does cooperate to some extent in that he answers Jane’s question, but he does not supply *enough* information. Jane infers from Bill’s violation of the first maxim of quantity that he intended to inform her that she had crossed the boundaries of polite conversation.
The point of this illustration is that while the exchange between Jane and Bill’s is partially governed by linguistic and cultural codes, situational norms, and broader social norms, a psychological (or more specifically, a motivational) explanation is required to understand fully the interaction between Bill and Jane. The conventional codes provide Jane and Bill options for action. Additional variables determine how they actually respond. Despite conventional mores, some people are quite happy to reveal their income or voting preference when they are asked about it. Yet others are more forward, and reveal the information without being asked. What is involved in each instance is a complex interaction of conventions, social-situational, broader social and cultural factors, and individual psychology. While exchanges such as that between Jane and Bill can be studied from a mono-disciplinary approach—whether it be sociology, linguistics, semiotics, or psychology—a combined approach is required for a comprehensive understanding.

In spite of the ubiquitous nature of phenomena which seem to call for a combined semiotic and psychological approach, neither the semiotic potential of psychology nor the psychological potential of semiotics has been fully realised. Semiotics has been neglected in the field of psychology and psychology has been neglected in the field of semiotics.

Part of the reason for the neglect of the interdisciplinary implications of semiosis is the lack of a clear and consistent theoretical framework for conceptualising semiosis. A realist approach, which highlights the triadic nature of semiosis and the relational nature of mental processes subserving semiosis, provides a sound foundation for an interdisciplinary approach.
CHAPTER 1: A REALIST APPROACH TO SEMIOSIS

A realist position is implicit in the triadic conceptualisation of semiosis. The triadic conceptualisation implies commitment to the view that there are three independently existing elements that enter into a sign relationship and that these elements have a spatiotemporal existence beyond their participation in the sign relationship. This is illustrated in the following figure:

Figure 2: A triadic conceptualisation of semiosis.

The case of map making can be used to illustrate the realist implications of semiosis. A creator of a map might use a shade of green to represent parks, sporting fields, nature reserves, botanical gardens, and so on. A basic logical implication is that the map-maker, the shade of green shown in the map, and the feature of the terrain referred to, have an existence that is independent of the other elements. This broad logical principle supports the specific realist principle that the shade of green in the map stands for features of reality. From a realist point of view, even if the shade of green is used to represent a fictional entity such as the forest of Lothlórien inhabited by Lady Galadriel (one of Tolkein’s characters from *Lord of the Rings*), this fictional forest entity must be derived from experiences of
real forests or aspects of landscapes that Tolkien (or someone who has directly or indirectly influenced his imagination) has come into contact with. In contrast, an idealist would argue, firstly, that we do not have direct knowledge of the world, as our immediate contact is with ideas. Further, he or she would argue that we cannot know the reality beyond ideas. A weaker form of realism is representationism, whereby ideas are postulated to correspond to reality, even though reality is not directly known.

The realist position has been the subject of much controversy. Miller (2005) expressed the view that “the nature and plausibility of realism is one of the most hotly debated issues in contemporary metaphysics, perhaps even the most hotly debated issue in contemporary philosophy” (para.1). Kenyon (1998) illustrated (perhaps in a slightly tongue-in-cheek tone) the confusion surrounding purportedly realist positions:

Meinong was a realist about non-existent entities; Democritus was a realist about atoms; Berkeley was a realist about ideas, but not physics; Quine is a realist about physics, but sometimes not about ideas. Depending on who we ask, Hume was either obviously an anti-realist about causal properties and moral properties, or clearly a realist about only one, or indubitably a realist about both. Mackie was a realist about physical properties, but not about moral properties. Russell was consistently a realist about sense data and relations, a sometime realist about external structure, a cautious realist about external objects, and an anti-realist about cause. Derrida is a realist about “text”, outside of which there exists nothing. (p. 2)

In a similar vein, correspondence theories of truth and representationist epistemological positions are sometimes regarded as realist positions because they postulate mental representations which are connected to reality. Peirce for example, claimed that “a realist is simply one who knows no more recondite reality than that which is represented in a true representation” (1868/1991, p.82). The postulation of propositional or mental entities which stand between the knower and the known, however, is not characteristic of a true realist position but constitutes a position between realism and idealism (Anderson, 1929/1962). Anderson’s observation regarding the inconsistency amongst realist positions is still relevant today:
In spite of the important advances towards realism which have been made in recent philosophical work, there has not yet been established anything which could be described as a realist school. This is due to the fact that the realist position has been insufficiently worked out, so that we have many competing mixtures of realism and idealism with... no clear criterion for deciding among them. (p. 60)

One way to clarify the realist position is to compare it with various anti-realist positions. Anti-realist positions exist under various labels. According to a position known as ontological idealism, there is no physical matter and that reality is composed of mind. On the other hand, epistemological idealist positions, including representationist theories of knowledge and relativist theories of truth, hold that there is a material reality but that there are necessary, rather than contingent, barriers to knowing reality. Relativism and idealism are tributaries to a broader post-modernist current that also flows through the field of semiotics. Postmodernism involves disengagement from truth claims and reality. By implication, postmodernists would also have problems with notions of rational discourse and argument (Maze, 2001; Franklin, 2006).

In the philosophy of science, instrumentalism and operationalism stand in opposition to realism. Instrumentalism is the view that scientific theories are tools that are used to achieve goals, such as the prediction and control of nature, rather than providing accounts of the operation of nature. According to the principle of operationalism, the chief instrument or tool of science is measurement and “questions which cannot be decisively answered with reference to operations are banned from science” (Clifton, 2005, para. 1).

1.1. REALIST LOGIC

The school of realist philosophy founded by John Anderson, sometimes called situational realism (Hibberd, 2005) or Australian realism (Baker, 1986), is particularly apt for use as a foundation for an exploration of the phenomenon of semiosis. Anderson’s is a thoroughgoing approach, in that he identified anti-
realist tendencies in realist positions as well as the more patent problems in idealism. He critically analysed the philosophical arguments of realist works such as that of Alexander (1920) and the American New Realist movement (Holt et al., 1912). Anderson was able to identify the characteristic problem of a wide range of anti-realist positions as the logical conflation of things and relations between things. He worked out the ramifications of the logical distinction for a wide range of philosophical investigation, including the philosophy of mind, aesthetics and ethics.

Anderson’s arguments for realism were grounded in logic. For example, epistemological realism follows from the principle that knowing agents and the objects of knowledge are logically independent. If they are logically independent, then knowledge cannot be a characteristic of the knower or the object of knowledge. Rather, knowledge must be a relation between the knower and the known (1927/1962). Anderson argued that if we clearly and consistently maintain the logical independence of the knower and the objects of knowledge, a realist position on the philosophy of mind follows.

The logical tools provided by Andersonian realism for distinguishing between relational and non-relational phenomena can address the frequent confusion of these categories in the fields of semiotics and psychology. Anderson noted that concepts such as ideas or consciousness transgress the principle of the independence of knower and known to the extent that they are regarded as properties of the knower rather than relationships into which the knower enters. These idealist concepts appear in modern cognitive psychology in the guise of “representations”, which are sometimes regarded as properties of the brain.

While Anderson articulated the consequences of his logical separation of things and relations for the philosophy of mind, he did not say very much about the philosophy of language or semiotics. The logic of his approach can nevertheless be readily generalised to semiotic relationships. In supporting a
relational view of mind, Andersonian realism also, by implication, supports a relational view of semiosis.

The error of supposing that a mental relationship (between the knower and the known) can be reduced to one of the elements of that relationship (the knower) belongs to the same family as the error of supposing that a signifying relationship (consisting of the signifying subject, the signifier and signified) can be reduced to the signifier. Such a reduction occurs, for example, in Saussurian semiotics, where both the semiotic agent and reality are reduced to systems of signifiers. A detailed analysis of the logical distinction between things and relationships emphasised in Andersonian realism serves as a foundation for a further explication of semiosis.

Just as there needs to be a clear distinction between the knower and the known, there needs to be a clear distinction between the sign user, the medium of signification, and the object of signification. The logical correlates of the distinction between things and their relations can be illustrated with (a) general examples, (b) examples applying to (dyadic) cognitive relationships and (c) (triadic) semiotic relationships which presuppose the dyadic cognitive relation. The three correlates are as follows:

1. Relationships cannot be things. This principle can be illustrated with the following examples:

   a. If Jane and Jamal are standing next to one another, the relationship of proximity is not a third thing. Moreover, once Jane and Jamal move apart, their relationship of proximity disappears. “Relations, in other words, are not independently existing conglomerations of qualities, but manners of connection. When terms cease to connect in certain ways, it is not the case that the relation between them lingers until needed at a later time, it simply ceases to be” (Medlow, 2004, p. 214).
b. If Jane sees some apples sitting in a bowl, the perception of the apples is a mental relation between Jane and the object she perceives, not a part of Jane or part of the apples. The perception is not a thing (such as a percept, idea, ideal, or representation). Moreover, while Jane may be composed of parts that are related to one another, Jane’s perception of the apple cannot be internal to Jane. This logical principle is strikingly transgressed in “modern” representationist models of mind which are in fact very similar to the idealism of Locke and Hume. Fodor (1997) for example, claims that mental representations are related to propositional attitudes as follows: For each event that consists of a creature’s having a propositional attitude with the content \( P \)… there is a corresponding event that consists of the creature being related, in a characteristic way, to a token mental representation that has the content \( P \) (p. 830)

In effect Fodor is claiming that if Jane believes that there are some apples sitting in a bowl, then Jane is somehow related to a mental representation with the content “there are some apples sitting in a bowl”. Thus the cognitive relationship between Jane and the bowl of apples is described as an internal relationship between Jane and the mental representation of the apples sitting in the bowl.

c. If Jane uses the phrase “fruit bowl” to refer to the bowl of apples, this is a psychosemiotic relationship between Jane, a signifier and a signified object. Just as the cognitive relationship between Jane and the fruit bowl cannot be a thing, so too,

- The pragmatic relationship (in the linguistic sense) between Jane and the signifying phrase “fruit bowl” cannot be a thing.
• The semantic relationship between the phrase “fruit bowl” and the object to which Jane refers by means of this phrase cannot be a thing.

2. A close corollary of principle (1) is that a relationship cannot be a quality, part or feature of a thing. Thus,

   a. If Jane and Jamal are standing next to one another, the relationship of proximity is not a part of Jane or Jamal.

   b. If Jane sees some apples sitting in a bowl, the perception of the apples is a mental relation between Jane and the object she perceives. The perception is not a quality of Jane’s brain, mind, or retina. Neuroscientists might detect brain activity and a retinal impression in Jane which corresponds to the image but Jane cannot perceive these. The perceptual relationship in question is between Jane and the fruit bowl, not Jane and her retinal image or Jane and her brain activity. In “functionalist” approaches to mind, “states of mind are taken to be nodes in a causal network” (Heil, 2004, p. 102). This is not logically viable. While brain states can be terms in a causal relationship, mental phenomena are not nodes, terms or qualities but material relations between person and objects of mentation. Mental phenomena such as knowing, perceiving, remembering, being in love, or envying involve knowing, perceiving, or remembering something or loving or being envious of someone. Since mental phenomena are inescapably relational, they cannot be found in the knower. As McMullen (1982) puts it: “to be conscious of something or to experience something is not to say that one has an element or piece of ‘consciousness’ or ‘experience’ of that thing”. Analogously, if a fox jumps over a dog, then in contrast to its pointy snout and bushy tail, the jump over the dog is not part of the fox (1982, p. 223).
c. The pragmatic relationship between Jane and the signifying phrase “fruit bowl” cannot be reduced to a quality of Jane or the signifying phrase. Similarly, the (semantic) relationship between the phrase “fruit bowl” and the fruit bowl cannot be reduced to a property of the signifier or the object it stands for. Hence neither signifiers nor objects of semiosis “have” or “contain” meaning. Nor is semiosis a quality of the triadic relationship. Rather, semiosis is the triadic relationship.

3. The things that stand in a relationship exist outside of the relationship but there can be no relationships free of terms or things. This principle can be illustrated with the following examples:

   a. If Jane and Jamal are standing next to one another they must be more than instances of the relationship of proximity.

   b. Jane may perceive the apples in the fruit bowl, but neither Jane nor the fruit bowl can thereby be defined in relational terms. Jane cannot be adequately defined solely in relational terms as the “knower of the fruit bowl”. Nor can the fruit bowl be specified adequately as “that which is known by Jane”.

   c. Similarly, the elements of the semiotic triad cannot be defined in terms of the triadic relationship, the constituent pragmatic and semantic relationships, or the logically more fundamental mental relationship. As noted above, if the paradigmatic semiotic relationship consists of $x$ using $y$ to stand for $z$, or $x$ using $y$ to communicate $z$, then $x$, $y$ and $z$ must each have an independent existence beyond their semiotic or mental configuration.
1.2. REALIST EPISTEMOLOGY

The Andersonian realist position can be explicated further by contrasting it with idealist and representationist epistemologies. It can also be contrasted with correspondence, pragmatist, and relativist theories of truth. According to representationist epistemologies, individuals do not know reality directly. Rather, knowledge is mediated by ideas, or mental entities which represent reality. According to the correspondence theory of truth, propositional entities mediate an individual’s assertions and reality. According to pragmatic theories of truth, truthful propositions are those that are useful in achieving practical goals. Relativism is the view that truth and reality are relative to a particular point of view.

1.2.1 Realism versus representationism

In contrast to the representationist view, the Andersonian realist position is that individuals have direct access to reality. Such a view may seem intuitively plausible and akin to common sense but it is in some ways quite different to folk psychology. For example, people commonly regard thoughts as occurring “in the head”. Because these thoughts are regarded as about things outside of the mind, common sense views are not sceptical about the existence of the real world (as are some idealist positions). Rather, the common sense position is a form of representationism whereby mental images are regarded as corresponding to real-world situations. The common sense view is remarkably similar to some basic assumptions in cognitive science. Fodor (1997), for example, describes the concept of representation common in computational approaches to cognition as follows: “The idea that there are mental representations is the idea that there are ideas minus the idea that ideas are images” (p. 830). Instead of mental images, Fodor speaks of “propositional attitudes”. These are the range of beliefs and desires that people can theoretically hold. For convenience, he uses the symbol $P$ as a label for the content of propositional attitudes. Thus $P$ could represent contents of beliefs such as “It is raining” or desires such as wanting it to stop.
raining. Like mental images, these beliefs are postulated to be “in the head”, even though Fodor wants to claim “metaphysical neutrality” when it comes to the nature of propositional attitudes. In an effort to preserve metaphysical non-commitment, Fodor follows Steven Schiffer’s strategy for describing propositional attitudes:

I assume everyone who has beliefs has a belief box in their head. Then, for each episode of believing that $P$, there is a corresponding episode of having in one’s belief box, a mental representation that means that $P$. (1997, p. 830)

Fodor adds that believing that $P$ means “being related in a characteristic way to a token mental representation that has the content $P$” (1997, p. 830). In this way, he claims to arrive at a formulation which is neutral in respect of the material instantiation of propositional attitudes. Fodor does not literally mean that there is a box in people’s heads, he means that we can create adequate metaphysically neutral models using such boxes. But these are nevertheless models of what is going on inside people’s heads and this creates a fundamental logical problem.

A sensible realist question to ask is whether Fodor has done anything more than re-describe, in rather tortuous terms, the simple fact that when someone believes something (or has some other propositional attitude), they are related to a state of affairs with the content $P$. For example, if $P$ stands for the proposition “It is raining” and someone believes $P$, then they are related to that state of affairs. A realist would question the need to postulate a replica state of affairs in the person’s head, which acts as a representation of the state of affairs. Such a representational entity would only be intelligible if there were someone or something inside the person’s head to believe the content of the representation. But this leads to a circular or infinitely regressive explanation of what it means to know something. It is also a vicious infinite regress since it constantly presupposes what it is designed to explain—how believing is possible in the first place. In other words “propositional attitudes” are not a conceptual advance from “mental images”. Whether representations are conceived in terms of images or propositional attitudes, they are nevertheless representations and as such, they
must represent something for somebody. This in turn implies that there is someone (or some agency) inside the person’s head that perceives the image or propositional attitude. Otherwise there is no knowledge of the representation. We could, for the sake of the argument accept the postulation of a perceiving agency (some kind of homunculus) inside the head. But then there would have to be another agency in the homunculus that performs a similar function. This postulation of a homunculus within a homunculus means than an infinite regress ensues (Ryle, 1949; Cottingham, 1987). Fodor’s outline of the representationist position illustrates that the relationship between brain and world that constitutes knowledge cannot be explained by postulating a corresponding nexus inside the brain.

Putnam (1994) blames Descartes’ mind-body dualism for triggering the unproductive scepticism about knowledge found in representationist positions:

Our difficulty in seeing how our minds can be in genuine contact with the “external” world is, in large part, the product of a disastrous idea that has haunted Western philosophy since the seventeenth century: the idea that perception involves an interface between the mind and the “external” objects we perceive. In dualistic versions of early modern metaphysics and epistemology, that interface was supposed to consist of “impressions” (or “sensations” or “experiences” or “sense data” or “qualia”), and these were conceived as immaterial. (p. 488)

Thus, rather than being sceptical about the “external” world, our scepticism would be better directed towards putative entities that mediate between the knower and the known. For one thing, when people’s heads are opened up, or scanned, we find nothing there that resembles impressions, images, thoughts, memories, emotions or feelings. In order to save the theory, we could posit a mind (or soul) which is incorporeal and which is the container of these thoughts and feelings. One major problem with such a position is the difficulty in explaining the interaction of the hypothetical non-material realm with the material realm. Surely if non-material things like ideas, impressions, or even the soul are to have an effect on material entities like the brain, then they are not that different to material things and do not belong to a different realm. Yet if they do not belong to a
different realm, where are they? When we are reading a ghost story we might be able to suspend our disbelief about logical inconsistencies such as these. Thus we can appreciate fictional works where a malevolent ghost passes through walls of a building at whim because of its non-material nature. The same ghost however can also be portrayed as powerful when it comes to exerting its influence on the material world, so that it can inflict anything from gale-force winds to full control of its victims by means of possession. When it comes to the philosophy of mind and meaning, we cannot afford to suspend our critical faculties in such a manner.

The solution that Putnam proposes to problems with representational entities sponsored by Cartesian dualism is to identify these entities as equivalent to brain states:

The position I described as “Cartesianism cum materialism” simply combines the two versions: the interface consists of “impressions” or “qualia”, and these are “identical” with processes in the brain. (1994, p. 488)

One reason that Putnam’s proposed materialist solution is important is that similar positions have been adopted in the mainstream of psychological thinking, especially in the information processing approaches. Not all philosophers of mind have been as wary as Fodor in maintaining the metaphysical neutrality of their theoretical constructs. While Fodor attempts to describe mental processes in abstract functionalist terms, Putnam conceives of mental processes literally, as brain processes. Both conceptualisations are unsound in that they do not conceive of mental processes in relational terms.

Cartesian dualist positions, the materialist solution offered by Putnam, and Fodor’s “metaphysically neutral” position each fail because they do not treat mental processes as relational phenomena. While Fodor, for example, may try to remain ontologically neutral, he cannot remain logically non-committal. In other words, he would have to have a model of something that could conceivably exist and that would mean replacing the representational concept with a relational concept of mind.
Semiotic theory is also weakened by representationist positions. The work of Roland Barthes can be used as an example of a position informed by representationism. Barthes argues that structuralist semiotics aims to create models of semiotic structures so that the rules according to which these structures operate become apparent:

The goal of structuralist activity, whether reflexive or poetic, is to reconstruct an “object” in such a way as to manifest thereby the rules of functioning (the “functions”) of this object. Structure is therefore actually a simulacrum of the object, but a directed, interested simulacrum, since the imitated object makes something appear which remained invisible, or if one prefers, unintelligible in the natural object. (1957/1972, p. 149)

The use of a model in this way, as a simulacrum of the object of study, is partially consistent with a realist approach. An “interested” simulacrum, derived from the interests of the investigator, can nevertheless refer to aspects of reality. A realist, however, would propose something like the following argument: In order for something which was formerly “invisible” or “unintelligible” to be incorporated into the simulacrum or model, it must have been known independently of the simulacrum or model. In contrast, Barthes implies that the simulacrum allows for the construction, rather than discovery, of reality:

It is because this fabrication of meaning is more important . . . than the meanings themselves, it is because the function is extensive with the works, that structuralism constitutes itself as an activity, and refers the exercise of the work and the work itself to a single identity: a serial composition or an analysis by Levi-Strauss are not objects except insofar as they have been made: their present being is their past act: they are having-been-mades. (1957/1972, pp. 153-154)

Barthes’ claim that an investigator creates, rather than discovers, the rules of operation of the object of study manages to combine the worst tendencies of pragmatism and representationism. In effect he is claiming that the process of research creates the field of research and that this creation, or “fabrication,” is coextensive with the field itself. Barthes’ statement takes him closer to the position of idealism, where the field of study disappears altogether.
Barthes’ position is in keeping with the common postulate in structuralist traditions of semiotics that systems of signifiers (sign vehicles) that refer to signifieds (concepts) are determined by this system. The structuralist notion of signifiers constituting reality is just one in a long string of entities which have been postulated as a barrier between the knower and the known. It is a short step from this constructionist and representationist perspective, where reality is seen as mediated by go-between entities, to an idealist-scepticist position where the reality beyond the stratum of “go-between” entities is fundamentally unknowable. Thus Freundlieb (1988) discusses what he calls the “semiotic idealist” position, which consists of the central “idea that there is no independently existing reality that can, at least in [principle], be known by us except through prior linguistic or semiotic conditions of knowledge (p. 807)”. Freundlieb adds that this position “is obviously a variation of an old Kantian theme” (p. 807).

The preceding analysis of structuralist semiotics illustrates that theories of knowledge are related to theories of truth and reference. As Putnam notes, the “‘how does language hook onto the world?’ issue is, at bottom, a replay of the old ‘how does perception hook onto the world?’ issue” (1994, p. 456).

1.2.2 Realist versus correspondence theories of truth

According to Davidson (1990) modern theories of truth “fall into two broad categories: those which humanise truth by making it basically epistemic, and those which promote some form of correspondence theory” (p. 289). The epistemic view, he argues, is associated with relativism, scepticism and subjectivism, while the correspondence view is related to realism.

However, it is a common error to describe correspondence theories as realist. According to Sayers (1985) for example,

Correspondence theory locates truth in the relation between ideas and the material world apart from them. In this way, it embodies the central tenet of
realism: that true ideas reflect objective reality, which exists independently of consciousness. In some shape or form, for this reason, the idea that truth is correspondence is an essential part of all realist and materialist epistemology. (pp. 177-178)

Sayers’ account of the correspondence theory of truth has resonances of the representationist theory of knowledge and is not a thoroughgoing realist approach. Correspondence theories of truth face the same problems as the representationist epistemological notions discussed above. In order to know whether true ideas or propositions correspond with reality, we have to have independent access to reality. If we can have independent access to reality, then mediate entities such as ideas or representations of reality become redundant. Thus in Andersonian realism, there is no realm of ideas, only mental acts; that is to say, there exist only thoughts and beliefs about reality. The realist position is that there is “nothing by believing which we believe something else” (Anderson, 1930/1962, p. 55, italics in original). Hence Davidson is correct in asserting that the notion of correspondence “cannot be made intelligible”. He is incorrect to assume that the link between realist approaches and correspondence approaches is a necessary, rather than a contingent one.

The realist view of truth, if it has any content, must be based on the idea of correspondence, correspondence as applied to sentences or beliefs or utterances – entities that are propositional in character; and such correspondence cannot be made intelligible. (1990, p. 304)

One of the reasons why correspondence theory cannot be made intelligible is clearly illustrated by Lacey (1976):

This theory involves a relation between two things, that which is true (a proposition, belief, judgement, etc.) and that which makes it true (a fact, or perhaps a state of affairs or event). The fact has a structure that the proposition, etc., copies or pictures. But finding pairs of things which correspond in this way is difficult, especially since the sort of structure that a proposition might have, involving the relations between things like nouns and verbs or subjects and predicates, seems entirely different from any features of the outer world. (p. 220)
It is difficult to surmount the gap between propositions and reality in correspondence theory because correspondence theory is not a realist, but a mediate or representationist, theory of truth. Representationism is halfway between realism and idealism in that it postulates a material reality which can only be known through an ideal realm.

A related position on the issue of truth and reference, coherence theory, also contains anti-realist principles. Hospers summarises the position as follows:

It is not the correspondence of propositions with facts that constitutes truth, according to this view, but rather the coherence of propositions with one another. Coherence is a relation among propositions, not a relation between a proposition and something else (a state-of-affairs) that is not a proposition. (Hospers, 1967, p. 116, italics in original)

Coherence theory can be seen as a natural outgrowth of the failure of correspondence theory to account for the gap between propositions and states of affairs. Carr’s (1998) description of coherence theory illustrates that it is closer to correspondence theory than is apparent in Hospers’ definition:

We have no knowledge of reality as such, only of the conceptualised version of it for which our intellect is, at least in part, responsible. When we are aware that there are trees in Russell Square, this awareness, rather than being simply a direct acquaintance with a mind-independent, unconceptualised bit of the world, is on the contrary an imposition on the world of our own conceptual scheme. (p. 84)

Semiotic theories in the structuralist tradition exhibit aspects of coherence theory in that they assume that semiotic structures impose a conceptual scheme onto the world. Eggins (2004) for example, claims that “reality is constructed through the oppositions encoded in the semiotic systems of the language we use” (p. 18). The role of networks of mind-dependent propositions in the coherence theory of truth is analogous to networks of signifiers external to mind in structuralist semiotics. Like structuralist semiotics, coherence theory has an inward, systemic focus:
The ‘facts’, in other words, are not ‘out there’ to be compared to our judgements or propositions, but exist in the same realm as propositions. They are really themselves propositional in nature, and what looks to the correspondence theorist to be correspondence between proposition and fact is simply correspondence between proposition and proposition. An assessment of the truth of the proposition that there are trees in Russell Square is therefore an assessment of the consistency between propositions. And what the Coherence Theory holds truth to be is a systematic coherence between propositions. (Carr, 1988, p. 85)

The notion of coherence between propositions proposed by coherence theory is echoed in the structuralist notion of meaning determined by means of a system of differences within a language. Unlike propositions, however, signifiers are postulated as bereft of meaning in themselves, with meaning emerging in the interplay between signifiers.

In contrast, Anderson’s realist theory excludes “propositional entities” mediating the knower and the known. For Anderson the proposition is the state of affairs or occurrence proposed, not an entity that corresponds to the state of affairs:

What is “proposed” or supposed in a proposition is a certain state of affairs, and that whoever believes the proposition takes that state of affairs to have actually occurred – as he indicates by the use of the copula “is . . . In general . . . when a person formulates a proposition, the copula indicates that he thinks something has occurred, and the terms . . . indicate what he thinks has occurred. In other words, a proposition is something that can be thought to have occurred or not to have occurred. . . . If the proposition or judgement is true, then the supposed situation has occurred. (Anderson, 1926/1962, p.22)

This view of truth is so novel and may seem too simple in the light of the less parsimonious explanations offered by idealism and correspondence theory. Baker (1986) clarifies Anderson’s view:

According to Anderson, when someone S believes that A is B and this is a true proposition, he recognises an actual situation, A’s being B. That is, true propositions do not ‘represent’ or ‘convey’ situations, they are situations. (p. 15)
In summary, it is incorrect to describe correspondence positions as realist. Realism posits an unmediated relationship between the knower and the known whereas correspondence theories posit a relationship between the knower and a representation or proposition. In correspondence theories, reality is known by means of these representations or propositions.

1.2.3. Realism versus relativism

As noted above, Davidson divides contemporary views of truth into two camps. In one camp there is the correspondence view and in the other camp, there is the relativist, scepticist and subjectivist conglomeration of views. In contrast to relativism, Andersonian realism asserts that the truth value of a proposition is independent of the circumstances in which the proposition is made. Vision (1998) summarises the sociology of the relativist strand of the anti-realist position as follows:

My impression is that what philosophers commonly call metaphysical anti-realism is now a widely accepted paradigm. In some areas which intersect very haphazardly with the concerns of professional philosophers—say literary, anthropological and sociological theory—the notion that reality is constructed by cognisors is by now an uncontroversial supposition; an article of group initiation or a prerequisite for getting a serious hearing. Such anti-realism has succeeded in becoming identified with up-to-date and progressive thinking, while realism has been relegated to the stodgy, cobwebbed tradition of less enlightened times. Indeed, like the term “bourgeoisie”, “realism” is in some codes an expression of mild opprobrium, suggesting – as does “bourgeoisie” – an identification with the wrong set of values. One manifestation of this sort of anti-realism is relativism about truth and conceptual schemes. In certain disciplines such relativism has become virtually synonymous with tolerance. (1988, p. xiii)

Norris (1997) notes that, while purporting to be a theory of tolerance, relativism “can … give rise to a subtle form of cultural imperialism” (p. 194).

The argument may start out from a healthy sense of diverse beliefs and ideas which make up a flourishing world culture. But it also carries the suggestion that the only way to take this variety on board is to adopt the kind of tolerant
pluralist position which tends to characterise the more “advanced” forms of western cultural consciousness. (p. 194)

The healthy sense of diverse beliefs and ideas that Norris refers to is quite compatible with realism. Peoples’ various beliefs are just as real as non-mental phenomena such as the water cycle and photosynthesis. Moreover, one of the principles of realism is that beliefs cannot be used to justify what people ought to do, what values they ought to hold, or how they ought to live (Maze, 1973). What Norris is identifying in the relativist position is the subtle message that one ought to be a relativist, leading to the following inconsistent positions:

1) Relativism is open to the diversity of human beliefs and values
2) According to relativism, positions which are not open the diversity of human beliefs and values are inferior

Hodge and Kress (1988) try to overcome this inconsistency by conceding that their relativist position is not inherently superior. Thus the arguments of relativist semioticians are just one set amongst many equally valid alternatives, they state. Hodge and Kress recognise that to claim equality amongst a diversity of claims is nonetheless to put forward a factual proposition. They nevertheless claim that this contradiction is of no special concern to the semiotician.

“Truth” and “reality” are . . . categories, from a semiotic point of view, which mark the agreement over or challenge to the temporary state of the semiotic system. As categories they are no more problematic or intrinsically inaccessible to discussion and analysis than other semiotic categories, such as code, meaning, or participant. The practice of semiotics is of course itself inevitably a semiotic act, unable to declare absolute truths about absolute reality, while constantly doing so – as we are doing in this sentence. Social semioticians have no greater obligation to be troubled by this than any other semiotic agent. (pp. 122-123)

Hodge and Kress’s assertion that any semiotic agent would be equally troubled by this problem is incorrect. Realism would be troubled by this problem because realism is not a relativist theory of truth. Nor does realism subscribe to the notion of absolute truth and absolute reality. In the realist framework, no degrees of truth
or reality are proposed. A key principle of realism is the separation of the knower and the known. As a corollary of this principle, realism is able to distinguish between the truth of arguments proposed, and the social and historical circumstances in which arguments are proposed. In contrast, Hodge and Kress’s position is self-refuting because, from their purported framework, they are unable to make any true claims about reality. Unless we make the assumption that we can make true statements about reality, it is pointless to engage in any discourse. In spite of their stated position, the manner in which Hodge and Kress unfold their argument indicates that they do in fact subscribe to the view that truth claims are possible. This is revealed in the very first sentence of the quote above, for the authors state that truth and reality are a matter of agreement or disagreement about the organisation of a semiotic system. This claim is presented as true, and it presupposes the additional truth claim that individuals can perceive semiotic systems and put forward propositions about semiotic systems.

The problem of the self-refuting paradox (“I am not making any truth claim” – what I just claimed is true) is a more serious problem for Hodge and Kress than they are willing to admit. If realist semioticians, in contrast to social semioticians, do make truth claims, Hodge and Kress must grant the realist, from their relativist/pluralist perspective, at least equal claim to the truth. Given this, what argument can they advance to justify their claim that relativism is true-for-them while realism is not? It all comes down to power, they might argue:

Contending parties seek to impose their own definition of what will count as “truth” and “reality”, as a decisive moment in the battle for social control. As a result, terms like “truth” and “reality” have come to acquire a tarnished and dubious air; they are not objective absolutes to which anyone can appeal but premises created and exploited by specific competing social groups. Since appeals to something like truth and reality are so fundamental in the social construction of meaning, social semiotics must be able to theorise the process. But since those categories seem to be intrinsically relative to the specific semiotic agent whose “truth” or “reality” it is, the notions seem unavailable for use in a semiotic theory that tries to explain them. (1988, pp. 121-122)
In summary, Hodge and Kress (1988) use their relativist position to dismiss notions of truth and reality as being relative to a “specific semiotic agent”. In defending their position Hodge and Kress put forward contradictory assertions:

1. Truth and reality are “unavailable for use in a semiotic theory that tries to explain them”.
2. As categories (truth and reality) are no more problematic or intrinsically inaccessible to discussion and analysis than other semiotic categories.

There are no problems with Hodge and Kress’ view that truth claims can be subjected to sociological analysis. They acknowledge that their own position could be analysed from a sociological point of view. Thus, it could be argued that they support a relativist theory because it most promotes their social position. The problem with Hodge and Kress’ analysis lies in the fact that they argue that there is nothing more to truth than its sociological and semiotic dimension. Hodge and Kress contradict the content of their argument by the way they advance their argument. They assert propositions about truth, power and the social context and claim that these are true propositions.

From a realist point of view, however, the social origins of a true proposition and the motivation for asserting a proposition, has no bearing on the truth of propositions. As Anderson said, “to explain how we come to think anything does not explain whether it is true or not” (1926/1962, p. 16), or as Hibberd (2005) states, “whilst the proposing involves various agreed-upon sociolinguistic conventions, what is proposed does not, and it is for the latter that truth is claimed” (p. 48).

Hence, the interesting points that Hodge and Kress make about the sociology of knowledge are compatible with Andersonian realism as long as they are not treated as epistemological assertions, but as empirical hypotheses. The sound sociological points made by Hodge and Kress go against the grain of their
relativist leanings. A relativist approach which denies that truth and falsity are real categories cannot distinguish between propositions that are ideologically slanted or otherwise biased. Hence such a model is ill-equipped to account for how the interests of individuals or groups are served by the promotion of biased beliefs and why these biased beliefs are adopted or rejected.

1.2.4. Realist versus pragmatist theories of truth

Relativists such as Hodge and Kress (1988) are sceptical about the notion of truth because they see truth claims varying as a function of the social group from which they emanate. In contrast, pragmatists are credulous about the notion of truth because the usefulness of a particular proposition or theory, including its social or personal usefulness, can serve as criterion for distinguishing between what is true and what is false. Pragmatism defines true propositions as those which are useful in achieving a certain goal.

The simplest statement of the theory is that it equates truth with success: a proposition is true if it 'works in practice’, if it has a practical utility or usefulness. This thesis is of course in danger of collapsing into tautology, if success is equated with successfully conforming to the facts. The pragmatists certainly did not intend it that way, offering instead the striking ... claim that if a proposition satisfies the needs or wants of the individual it is true. (pp. 87-88)

For example, Newtown’s laws of physics can be regarded as true from a pragmatist’s point of view, because these laws help us to build roads and bridges and these can satisfy our need to get from one location to another. The instrumentalist approach to scientific methodology takes a position that usefulness is more important than truth. According to Blackburn (1996), one of the most famous instrumentalist arguments was put forward by Andreas Oseander (1498-1552), who argued the view that “Copernicus’s heliocentric theory of the solar system should be accepted as a device for predicting eclipses and tides, but not regarded as true (and therefore potentially in conflict with Church doctrine)” (entry 1252). A realist would argue that usefulness usually follows from truth. Hence predictions about tides, eclipses, and the weight-bearing capacity of
bridges are useful because they are, to some extent at least, based on a correct account of the way things are.

While a true proposition in Anderson’s scheme is the result of an act of striving to propose, he distinguished the motivational basis of true and false propositions from the propositions themselves:

No doubt it depends on our state of mind whether we believe a certain proposition or not (and similarly whether we understand a statement made to us). But to explain how we come to think anything does not explain whether it is true or not. Even if the proposition is about ourselves, its truth is not dependent on our believing it. (1926/1962, p. 16)

1.2.5. Realism versus redundancy theory

The Andersonian realist position on truth has much in common with Ramsey’s (1927) “redundancy theory” of truth. Ramsey’s argument is that the concept of truth only has existence as a linguistic construction:

There is really no separate problem of truth but merely a linguistic muddle. Truth and falsity are ascribed primarily to propositions. The proposition to which they are ascribed may be either explicitly given or described. Suppose first that it is explicitly given; then it is evident that “it is true that Caesar was murdered”. They are phrases that we sometimes use for emphasis or for stylistic reasons, or to indicate the position occupied by the statement in our argument. So also we can say “it is a fact that he was murdered” or “that he was murdered is contrary to fact”. (p. 157)

This is congruent with Anderson’s realist position. Anderson argued that to describe something as true is redundant because a true proposition simply collapses into a state of affairs, or fact.

From Ramsey’s point of view, to say something is true is merely a stylistic device, expressing a greater degree of conviction compared to simply saying something about the world without using the word true. Ramsey also considers the case where the assertion of truth is not made explicitly, but implied:
Thus if I say “he is always right” I mean that the propositions he asserts are always true, and there does not seem to be any way of expressing this without using the word “true”. But suppose we put it thus “for all p, if he asserts p, p is true”, then we see that the propositional function p is true is simply the same as p, as e.g., its value “Caesar was murdered is true”, is the same as “Caesar was murdered”. We have in English to add “is true” to give the sentence a verb, forgetting that “p” already contains a (variable) verb. (Ramsey, 1927, p. 158)

From Ramsey’s point of view truth can be regarded as a stylistic aspect of sentences or utterances. In addition to using this sentence to propose that a state of affairs is the case, the sentence may also indicate something to an observer about the communicator’s stylistic or rhetorical preferences. For example, the following sentences describe the same state of affairs, but they have a different style:

1. That Caesar was murdered is true
2. Caesar was murdered

Compared to sentence 2, sentence 1 is more likely to occur in the context of a debate where the circumstances of Caesar’s death are in dispute. Ramsey discusses individuals’ assertions about states of affairs without postulating an epistemological layer between the individual and those states of affairs. Hence Ramsey’s position stands out—in contrast to the correspondence, coherence, relativist and pragmatist views of truth—as the only position consistent with Andersonian realism.

1.3 ACTION

The previous section was focused on an analysis of the triadic sign relationship from the point of view of epistemology. Realist logical principles also have implications for an analysis of the sign relationship as a type of action.

The triadic conceptualisation of semiosis, after all, has three aspects. Firstly, there is the relationship between signifiers and signifieds. Secondly, there is the “use” relationship focused on the relationship between semiotic agents and
signifiers. Thirdly, there is the mental relationship between the knower and the known. One of the key realist principles established in the discussion so far is that while it is possible to focus on one or other aspect of the semiotic triad, these aspects can never be considered completely in isolation because, as we saw, semiosis is not reducible to its component parts. Hence any account of semiosis as action must be a relational account that is in accord with the realist principles outlined so far.

The distinction between thought and action is a fundamental one in folk psychology. Thus thought is often seen as a prelude or a guide to action, as is suggested in the proverb, “Look before you leap!” which also implies that it is possible to act without thinking. A closer analysis of the concept of action, however, reveals the inseparability of the two concepts. Passmore (1962) observed that, for Anderson, “knowledge is a way of striving with things rather than a simple reflection of them” (xiii).

For Anderson the mind is a complex of feelings or passions, these being the things that strive. Such an approach to mind is by no means unique … Anderson was led to it by his reading of McDougall and Freud. (1962, pp. xiii-xiv)

One question that emerges from Anderson’s account is whether mental striving is fundamentally different from actions such as striving to kick a ball. Lyons (1995) expressed the view that thinking and doing are fundamentally different:

Our life involves many activities; some of these are non-mental activities, some are mental activities. An example of a non-mental activity is kicking a football. An example of a mental activity is thinking about a football. (p. 2)

Lyons’ bifurcation fails, however, because action is always directed towards an object or state of affairs in reality, and therefore implies cognition. Contrary to Lyons’ statement, kicking presupposes leg movements guided by cognition. For example if a football was placed in front of an individual’s leg at an appropriate height and their knee was tapped with a rubber mallet in the patellar region, then that person’s foot might hit the ball as part of a reflex. While central
nervous system phenomena such as reflexes and autonomic processes do not involve mental activity, actions are necessarily mental. Kicking a football is not just preceded by thinking; it is a manifestation of thinking.

It is true that many of the processes going on in humans are of the same order as a plant growing towards sunlight or a stinger missile seeking out a target according to temperature. Human reflex reactions are of this order. However, anything that can be properly referred to as action is laden with intentionality in the sense of emotional, cognitive or conative mental directedness towards an object.

Philosophers have also built a mountain of analyses predicated on the distinction between beliefs and desires and they have regarded action as a consequence of beliefs and desires. Cognitive-behavioural psychology, for example, has been built on the assumption that beliefs influence emotion and behaviour. One reason that this hoary bifurcation of thinking and doing should be questioned is that philosophers have not been able to agree as to the dividing line between them. Bentano (1924/1995) noted that from a historical point of view, belief, desire and volition have been the favoured categories for defining the mental:

Aristotle distinguished two fundamental classes, thought and appetite. Most authors instead prefer a trichotomy, of presentation, feeling and will (or whatever they choose to call them) (1924/1995, p. 197).

Brentano argued that “feeling” and “will” should be part of the same category. He added the action-oriented category, of “judgement”. In Brentano’s view, judgement involved accepting ideas as true or false (1924/1995). According to Brett (1930), the work of Brentano heralded a clear break of the passive view of mind characteristic particularly of British associationist approaches: “From Brentano onwards we find … the ruling principle that in psychology it is possible to classify activities but it is not possible to discover inert fragments” (p. 51).
Even if we insisted on a bifurcation of thought and action (or a trifurcation of thought, feeling, and action) it would not always be possible to neatly classify these phenomena. As Maze (1973) has demonstrated, some beliefs, such as the belief that “Conservative politicians are good”, often imply emotional preferences (such as “I like conservative politicians”) and exhortations (such as “One should vote for conservative politicians”). Phenomena such as mental arithmetic calculations, hypothesising, decision-making, stereotyping, and racial discrimination also belie the trifurcation of thinking, feeling and doing.

Thought, feeling, and action have in common a relational structure. In believing, something is believed, in desiring, something is desired and in acting, something is the target of action. Thus, it could be argued that actions are mental relationships that typically involve movements with a motivational salience. This relational view of action is compatible with the realist position—as long as the logical distinction between the actor and the target of action is maintained in the same way that the distinction between the knower and the known is maintained. This principle applies equally to the analysis of semiotic acts such as interpreting, symbolising, meaning, communicating, telling, representing, warning and illustrating. In this case, the actions are directed at targets by means of signifiers, or sign vehicles. The actor, signifier, and target of the action have to be specified independently.

While the concept of action is an important aspect of a realist account of semiosis, it has been marginalised in mainstream semiotics, particularly in models of semiotics descended from the work of Saussure. Saussurian semiotics involves an emphasis on langue, or the language system, rather than the uses and applications of the language system, such as communication. There is a similar tendency to ignore action in contemporary sociology and social psychology (Campbell, 1996). Psychologists working within the operationalist-empirical tradition conceptualise mental phenomena in terms of behaviour that is governed along the lines of physiological reflexes or computer operations. This is partially because the primary goal of operationalism is to define psychological concepts in
a manner that facilitates observation and measurement. The major problem with operationalism is that it neglects the fact that, in contrast to reflexes and inanimate movement, behaviour is directed at something. In contrast, a realist relational conceptualisation of behaviour is synonymous with the concept of action.

1.3.1. Action versus behaviourist and “behavioural” approaches

The operationalist spirit continues to influence contemporary psychology via the information processing and the behaviourist, (or “behavioural”) traditions. A closer examination of explanations in the behavioural strand of operationalism reveals that its partial success is due to the (usually unwitting) assumption of a realist relational conceptualisation of behaviour.

While mainstream modern psychology incorporated a shift away from the behaviourism of foundational figures such as Watson and Skinner, their legacy remains in behaviourally focused approaches. There is a presupposition in the behavioural view that the mind is a thing inside the head and is unobservable or too difficult to observe. Behaviour, however, is regarded as readily observable. In contrast, realist analysis demonstrates that mental processes are relational phenomena holding between a person and their environment and are therefore open to observation. Further, any meaningful analysis of behaviour is impossible without assuming mental processes (cf. Maze, 1983).

The evolution of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of the American Psychiatric Association (DSM)*, currently in its fourth edition, illustrates one of the influences of the behavioural approach. Over successive editions, the DSM has increasingly incorporated “behaviourally-focused” criteria for the diagnosis of various psychological disorders. A striking example is the disorder of psychopathy, which was removed from the third addition of the DSM and replaced with the category of anti-social personality disorder (APD). While psychopathy and APD are overlapping constructs, the diagnosis of APD involves reference to more “external” or “readily observable” symptoms which focus on the violation of
social norms including chronic acts of theft and lying. Psychopathy encompasses, in addition, symptoms from the interpersonal-affective realm such as lack of remorse for transgressions against others, and lack of empathy for the feelings and concerns of others (Hare, Hart, & Harpur, 1991). The operationalist and behaviourist impetus behind the shift from psychopathy to APD is clear from the following analysis:

The *DSM-III-R* approach to the diagnosis of APD is based on the assumption that personality traits are difficult to measure reliably and that it is easier to agree on the behaviours that typify a disorder than on the reasons why they occur (Robins, 1978, p. 256). Although the result has been a diagnostic category with good reliability, concerns have been expressed about its content and construct-related validity, in particular, about its relation to clinical conceptions of psychopathy in which inferences about affective and interpersonal processes have long played an important role. (Hare, et al., 1991, p. 329)

Unless we are prepared to accept that behaviour is saturated with emotions such as remorse, guilt and arrogant self-appraisal, we cannot make the important diagnostic distinction between anti-social personality disorder and the more serious condition of psychopathy. Hare et al., (1991) note that research evidence indicates that psychopathy is strongly associated with factors such as higher criminal recidivism, poorer responsiveness to treatment and a tendency to commit murder offences in the absence of emotional arousal. The benefits of this distinction have been sacrificed in recent editions of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual*, apparently for the sake of reliability of assessment.

There are two other principles originating in the behaviourist tradition relevant to the continuing popularity of behavioural formulations. Firstly, there is the Cartesian concept of mind as a mysterious inner entity. Ryle (1949) for example criticised the Cartesian conception of mind as the “ghost in the machine”. Mental processes have also been regarded as problematic in the behaviourist tradition because they are associated with the concept of free will. When the concept of behaviour is examined from an Andersonian realist perspective, however, it becomes clear that:
1. There can be no description of behaviour (as apposed to mere movement) that is devoid of reference to mental relations.

2. A realist relational conception of thought and behaviour is perfectly compatible with a determinist approach.

3. A realist relational conception of thought and behaviour is compatible with a materialist conception of mind.

From a realist point of view, the concept of behaviour is closely affiliated with the conception of action, in that the concept of action makes explicit reference to the role of mental processes in behaviour. The following hypothetical first person narrative account of action and social interaction can be used to illustrate realist principles:

When I saw my sister being attacked with a baseball bat by Sally and her family, I just lost it and the police had to restrain me. I was still going off by the time they got me to the station and they sprayed the capsicum spray in my eyes. I lifted my hands up to my face to protect myself and as I was doing that, I hit the cop on the wrist with my handcuffs.

The actor in this first person account implies that he was acting under the influence of powerful emotions, that it took a long time for him to settle down, and that he hit the police officer accidentally, in the course of protecting himself from the capsicum spray. It is only by reference to the actor’s beliefs and desires as well as descriptive categories for understanding behaviour (such as \textit{deliberate} versus \textit{accidental}) that we can speculate as to what the actor was doing. We need these relational and “mentalistic” categories in order to make a judgement about whether the actor was primarily defending himself or attacking the police officer.
We can create a third person description which makes less reference to mental processes, but mental processes can never be eliminated from descriptions of behaviour. The following example demonstrates that even an “objective” third person behavioural description of the same event trades on the fact that behaviour is saturated with mental processes:

The offender refused to cooperate with police and resisted arrest. In the process of being subdued with capsicum spray, he assaulted one of the officers, hitting him on the wrist.

These descriptions are recognisably descriptions of action because there is reference to the mental processes of the actors. To say that the offender “resisted arrest” for example, presupposes an attribution of numerous mental attributes to the offender, including the following:

1. The offender is a sentient being capable of beliefs, desires and using those beliefs to fulfil his desires, which is Daniel Dennett’s (1987) working definition of rationality. Thus, a rock would not be capable of resisting arrest.

2. The offender was familiar with the social institutions such as the police, social practices of being placed under arrest, and is regarded as being legally accountable (thus, a two-year old child could not be said to be resisting arrest).

3. The offender knew he was being placed under arrest (it would be questionable whether a person in a coma could be arrested).

4. The offender’s behaviour was deliberate and purposeful, rather than outside of his voluntary control (for example, he was not having an epileptic fit which made him difficult to arrest).
5. The offender was pursuing the goal of resisting arrest (perhaps in addition to other goals) rather than another goal that resulted in similar behaviours (such as trying to struggle free to get his asthma medication).

The last point, in particular, hints at some serious obstacles for behavioural descriptions, for there are a variety of behaviours that could be manifestations of the phenomenon of resisting arrest. Similarly, there are a large number of goals that could elicit the same behaviours. Hence, it is more difficult than it might at first seem to operationalise psychological concepts by restricting oneself to “observable behaviour”. What is true of human behaviour in general is true of communicative behaviour.

1.3.2. Semiotic behaviour as action

Ducrot and Todorov (1979) note two major competing approaches to language. One approach to language originates in the writings of Saussure and neo-positivist logicians such as Rudolph Carnap. This formalist tradition is focused on syntax (the rules of combination) and, to a lesser extent, on semantics (the rules of correspondence between semiotic forms and meaning contents). At the same time pragmatics, or language use, is relegated to the periphery of language. As Graham (2007) noted, some formalist philosophers also provided impetus for the operationalist and behaviourist tendency in modern psychology:

Quine, for example…. claimed that the notion of psychological or mental activity has no place in a scientific account of either the origins or the meaning of speech. To talk in a scientifically disciplined manner about the meaning of an utterance is to talk about stimuli for the utterance, its so-called “stimulus meaning”. Hempel (1949) claimed that “all psychological statements that are meaningful . . . are translatable into statements that do not involve psychological concepts,” (p.18) but only concepts for physical behaviour (§ 4)

Since the formal aspects of language were regarded as easier to observe, this aspect fitted better into the operationalist and behaviourist credo. Durcot and
Todorov also note that, throughout the history of linguistics, there has been an opposing approach which “subordinates structure to function and affirms the necessity of knowing why the language is, in order to know how it is” (1979, p. 339). It could be argued that the work of Bronislaw Malinowski belongs to this pragmatic or functional tradition.

Malinowski’s focus on language use grew out of his anthropological field studies. He gives an account of how he accomplished the difficult task of understanding native languages of the Polynesian and Melanesian regions by abandoning the attempt to map their languages into a European language and focusing instead on indigenous language use in context. This led Malinowski to conclude that “human speech is a mode of action rather than a countersign of thought” (1923, p. 326). In some respects, Malinowski anticipated both Bühler’s (1934/1990) and Austin’s (1962) action-oriented approaches to language. He argued that:

Each verbal statement by a human being has the aim and function of expressing some thought or feeling actual at the moment and in that situation, and necessary for some reason or other to be made known to another person or persons—in order to serve the purposes of common action, or to establish ties of purely social communion, or else to deliver the speaker of violent feelings or passions. (Malinowski, 1923, p. 307)

While Malinowski distinguished “three fundamental uses of language: active, narrative, and ritual” (1923, p. 325), the quote above also suggests the existence of an expressive, or emotive, category of language use. Whether he is speaking of active, narrative or ritual forms of language use, it is clear that for Malinowski, language use is anchored in the interaction of biological needs of the sign user and his or her interpersonal context. For example, Malinowski speculates on the possibility that the word mamma for mother may have entered the language by means of a natural connection between the sound and its object.

I have noticed in two children that at the stage where distinct syllables begin to be formed the repeated sound, ma, ma, ma . . . appears when the child is dissatisfied generally, when some essential want is not fulfilled or some
general discomfort is oppressing it. The sound attracts the most important object in its surroundings, the mother, and with her appearance the painful state of mind is remedied. Can it be that at the entry of the sound *mama*... just at the stage when articulate speech begins—with its emotional significance and its power to bring the mother to the rescue—has produced in a great number of languages the root *ma* for *mother*? (1923, pp. 319-320)

Malinowski also considers the alternative explanation that parents notice, and select for reinforcement, the first articulate syllables emitted by an infant which match the conventional common nouns referring to mothers. It is also the case that both explanations may apply, in that the set of first syllables of an infant’s repertoire may well be natural or indexical signs of inner states of frustration. From this set of natural signs one is arbitrarily selected to form the root of the word for mother.

Malinowski’s emphasis on the functions of language was echoed in John Austin’s (1962) speech act theory. Austin also places the analysis of language use at the centre of his approach. For example, Austin analyses a directive speech act such as a command as follows:

*Act (A) or Locution:*
He said to me, “Shoot her!” meaning by “shoot” shoot and referring by “her” to her.

*Act (B) or Illocution:*
He urged (or advised, ordered, and so on) me to shoot her.

*Act (C) or Perlocution:*
He persuaded me to shoot her.

(cf. 1962, pp. 101-102)

In other words, the utterance “Shoot her!” has three aspects. It is simultaneously 1) a locution or sentence with a particular propositional content, which in this case includes reference to a female person and the act of shooting, 2) an illocution in the sense that it is an act directed at an audience and as such has the force of an order, a piece of advice, exhortation or such like, and 3) something that has a particular effect on the audience or outcome after it is uttered. It may for example
have the effect of succeeding or failing to persuade the audience, annoying the audience, amusing the audience, and so on.

Austin’s argument that there were no utterances that were pure locutions, without an illocutionary force, was part of his demolition of the traditional distinction between saying and doing. For example if Jane tells Jamal that she heard that it is likely to rain later that day, she is probably performing a speech act of informing. She may of course be doing a lot more, such as warning him that he might get wet, and suggesting that he takes an umbrella. The precise meaning of her utterance can only make sense if it is considered as action. If Jane’s utterance is construed as behaviour separated from mental processes, we are left with an impasse when it comes to analysing what Jane actually meant by telling Jamal that it is likely to rain.

Austin argued that one of the hallmarks of communicative actions was that they were not judged only on the truth-value of their propositional content. As illocutions, they were judged according to their fit with a particular social context. Thus speech acts could be appropriate or inappropriate, sanctioned or not sanctioned by convention, and so on. Austin used the terms felicitous/happy and infelicitous/unhappy as a superordinate distinction that would embrace all of the ways that a speech act could be congruent or incongruent with its context. The following example illustrates the application of these concepts. If I randomly walk up to a couple in the street and say “I now pronounce you husband and wife”, the speech act is infelicitous or unhappy because I am not sanctioned to perform marriages, because the people I am marrying may not be interested in such a commitment, because appropriate witnesses are not present, and so on.

Austin raises the question of whether statements, which may seem like reflective rather that active uses of language, could qualify as actions:

Would it be correct to say that when we state something, (1) we are doing something as well as and distinct from just saying something, and (2) our
utterance is liable to be happy or unhappy (as well as, if you will, true or false)? (1962, p. 133)

Austin then argues that statements fulfil both criteria for membership of the action category. One of the arguments he puts forward for ascribing illocutionary force to statements is as follows:

Surely to state is every bit as much to perform an illocutionary act as, say, to warn or to pronounce. . . . Consider such an unexceptionable remark as the following: “In saying that it was raining, I was not betting or arguing or warning: I was simply stating the fact”. Here “stating” is put absolutely on a level with arguing, betting, and warning. (1962, p. 134)

In other words, the illocutionary aspect of statements is additional to the sense and reference of the statement and all statements have this additional component. As far as statements being subject to felicity conditions, Austin argues that when someone makes a statement such as “The cat is on the mat”, this constitutes an undertaking that the cat is indeed on the mat.

This is parallel to the sense—is the same sense—as that in which “I promise to be there” implies that I intend to be there. So the statement is liable to the insincerity form of infelicity. (1962, p. 136)

Potter and Wetherell argue that such an approach has much to offer psychology:

Austin’s theory represented a radical departure from much of the previous philosophical work on language because instead of viewing it as an essentially abstract corpus, which can be dealt with in the same way as logic and mathematics, he recognised that language is a human practice. . . . This feature of the theory makes it very attractive to social psychologists; as there is little in the psycholinguistic tradition which even begins to show how a researcher might deal with language function. (1987, p. 18)

Limitations of speech act analysis have been noted. For example, it is often unclear what speech act or communicative action is being performed without knowledge of the audience’s response and sometimes the communicator’s goal is not evident without an examination of several utterances that are strung together (Brown & Yule, 1982; Potter & Wetherell, 1987). However, limitations such as
these do not detract from Austin’s achievement of delivering a decisive blow to the wall that divided language and action.

Austin’s analysis, like Malinowski’s provides a corrective balance to semiotic and behavioural approaches that marginalise human agency. These authors are key exponents of the alternative approach to questions of communication and mind, which entails eschewing any conceptual hierarchy between what has been known as “language itself” and the “use of language” (Ducrot & Todorov, 1979).

1.4 INTENTION & INTENTIONALITY

The concept of action is closely allied with the concept of intention in the everyday sense of deliberate and goal-directed behaviour. Action and intention are, in turn, entwined with the philosophical concept of intentionality, or directedness of mental processes towards states of affairs.

The everyday sense of the term intentional refers to a quality of an action that is perceived as planned, willed or deliberate. Hornsby (2005) notes that there are grounds for separating intention from belief and desire:

Like desire, intention moves people to action; but whereas you may desire what you think you cannot achieve, you cannot intend [to achieve something] you think is [impossible to attain]. Like belief, intention sets constraints on what is done; but intentions, unlike beliefs, are not straightforwardly evaluable as true or false, and an account of what it is for one intention to be consistent with another is different from an account of what it is for one belief to be consistent with another. Intention, it seems, must be treated neither as an affective state (like desire) nor as a cognitive one (like belief), but as a distinctly practical state. (p. 411)

There is nevertheless a debate on whether or not intentions can be explained in terms of beliefs and desires (Mele, 1988; Audi, 1988). Notwithstanding this debate, the concept of intention is particularly salient in the field of communication in that it helps to distinguish true communication from the sounds
made by animals, such as birds. A shriek emitted by a bird at the approach of a predator is not emitted with the intention of warning the flock. Instead, “the bird is reacting automatically to the stimulus of seeing the enemy; its cry triggers . . . reactions in its companions, which take to flight, but the bird in fact utters the warning cry even if there are no companions present to be warned” (Barber, 1964, p. 25). Humans also emit unintentional indexes of their inner state that may be informative to those around them but the distinctive character of human communication is its intentional aspect. Unlike birds, humans can produce signifiers that are intended to be informative to those around them. Following a review of literature on animal signalling, Seyfarth and Cheney (2003) came to the conclusion that while some animals can emit signals with the goal of influencing their audience’s behaviour, they generally do not appreciate that the signals are cognised by the audience:

The inability of animals to recognise the mental states of others places important constraints on their communication and distinguishes animal communication most clearly from human language. With the possible exception of chimpanzees, animals cannot represent the mental state of another. As a result, whereas signalers may vocalize to change a listener’s behaviour, they do not call with the specific goal of informing others or in response to the perception of ignorance in another. Similarly, whereas listeners extract subtle information from vocalizations, this does not include information about the signaler’s knowledge. Listeners acquire information from signalers who do not, in the human sense, intend to provide it. (p. 168)

All mental phenomena, including belief, desire, intention, and action share the hallmark of intentionality or directedness of mental processes towards an object. The concept of intentionality holds great promise for the realist framework outlined in the present work because it is consistent with a relational view of mind and semiotics. Although it originated in Aristotle’s direct realist approach, Franz Brentano (1836-1917) did much to advance the discussion of intentionality, even though he expressed his ideas in an ambiguous way. In his Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint, he set out to delineate the unique subject matter of psychology and the features that best characterise mental phenomena. According to Simons (1995), Brentano thereby aimed to “establish the independence of
scientific psychology from both philosophy and physiology” (1995, p. xvi).

Brentano identified intentionality as the key defining characteristic of the mental:

Every mental phenomenon is characterized by what the Scholastics of the Middle Ages called the intentional (or mental) inexistence of an object, and what we might call, though not wholly unambiguously, reference to a content, direction toward an object (which is not to be understood here as meaning a thing), or immanent objectivity. Every mental phenomenon includes something as object within itself, although they do not all do so in the same way. In presentation something is presented, in judgement something is affirmed or denied, in love loved, in hate hated, in desire desired and so on. (1924/1995, p. 88)

Brentano was correct to speak of the intentionality as consisting of mental “direction toward an object”. However Brentano’s expression “every mental phenomenon includes something as object within itself” in the sense of having a “mental inexistence” is problematic, as it could be taken to mean that the objects of thought somehow exist in the mind. This would contravene the realist principle that the knower and the known must be independent entities. It would be better to abandon Brentano’s notion of “mental inexistence” and simply say that every mental phenomenon consists of a relationship between a knower and an object of knowledge. The logical independence of the knower and the known is one instance of the realist principle of the separation of things and relationships.

While Brentano drew upon Aristotle and the Scholastics in his elaboration of the concept of intentionality, a clearer conceptualisation is found in the works of the Middle Eastern philosophers that influenced the Scholastics. Simons (1995) notes that the notion of intentionality:

Entered Scholasticism not directly from the Greeks but via Islamic philosophy, the Latin [intentio] being an attempt to render Al-farabi’s and Avicenna’s terms ma’na and ma’qul, whose concrete meaning had to do with drawing (stretching, hence tension) a bow whose metaphorical target is the object intended. (p. xix)

This is an apt metaphor because it reflects both the relational nature of mental processes, and the separation of the knower from the object of knowledge. The
metaphor could be completed with a reference to an arrow. The image of a bow and arrow being aimed at a target reflects two aspects of intentional action: the cognitive aspect or intentionality reflected in the idea of the bow and arrow being directed at a particular object and the conative aspect, which is reflected in the stretching and tension of the bow and arrow and the flight of the arrow. The bow and arrow metaphor illustrates the inseparability of the cognitive and conative aspects of intentionality.

Both intention and intentionality are concepts that imply the directedness of mind towards objects. The difference between them is that intentionality emphasises the cognitive aspect while intention emphasises the motivational aspect of the directedness. This will become clearer when examining Maze’s (1983) objection to the concept of intention.

1.4.1. Analysis of objections to the concepts

While the concept of intention would appear to be an essential concept in understanding action, intentions are no more real than ghosts according to philosophers such as Maze (1983) or Ryle (1956). Maze argues that there are two major interrelated objections to the concept of intention. Firstly it is a voluntaristic concept and therefore incompatible with the deterministic approach essential to scientific investigation. Secondly, the concept is logically flawed in that it does not conform to the logical requirement that the object of the intention has to be specified independently of the agent of intention. Fortunately both of these criticisms can be addressed using the basic principles of Andersonian realism. This in turn clears the path for the integration of the sister concepts of intention and intentionality into a realist model of semiosis.

There is merit in the criticism that the concept of intention carries with it connotations which are inimical to a deterministic perspective and therefore to science. According to Maze (1983), the concept of intention implies that behaviour is generated from a causal vacuum or willed into existence: “The essential meaning of ‘acting intentionally’ is that such action is not caused” (p.
Moreover, if we cannot speak about cause and effect, when it comes to understanding psychological concepts, we have to abandon the possibility of a scientific approach. It is important to note, however, that Maze does at some points in his argument discuss flawed notions of causality associated with the concept of intention. This leads to the question of whether there could be a sound conceptualisation of intention compatible with determinism and therefore science.

Maze identifies a logical error in the way that the concept of intention is formulated: “The disability of the concept of intention (and of intentionality) is that it essentially involves the incoherent notion that the relation to its object is built into the mental ‘entity’, intention, itself” (1983, p. 24). He spells out the impoverished explanations that result from failing to define the concept of intention logically: “The explanatory teleological statement comes down to saying that S’s behavioural striving towards G … is caused by S’s having an internal store of striviness-towards-G”. (1983, p. 35). In other words, there is no explanation at all. For example, explaining the fact that Jane bought a newspaper from the newsagent by saying that she was caused to do so by a “newspaper buying intention”, is circular. Nothing is added in the explanation that is not already assumed in the statement to be explained. The act of buying a newspaper is already an intentional action. Maze’s goal is to eliminate poorly formulated conceptualisation such as this from the psychological vocabulary and thereby help psychology advance as a science. He argues that the concepts of desire and intention share the same logical flaw:

“Desire” along with “intention” suffers the disability that it is supposed to be an internal state that is nevertheless essentially characterised by its relation to a projected event or event-type; it is always desiring for something, this relation being intrinsic to it as conceived. (1983, p. 27)

Thus, the inability of intention theorists to specify what an intention is without referring to what was intended, rules out intention as a logically coherent concept, he argues. Maze demonstrates that the same problem can occur with cognitive concepts—paradigmatically belief—where the object of cognition is not specified independently of the cognisor. He asserts that the ways in which people
commonly use the concepts of desire and belief are plagued by the same problems of “intrinsic relatedness” and non-determinism as is the concept of intention.

Maze proposes that desire and belief can be retained because they can be re-specified as relations between two independently existing things: brain states and states of affairs. Since the believer and believed can be described independently, belief is a coherent concept, Maze argues. He is also optimistic that the notion of desire could be rehabilitated by specifying the source of the desire biologically, in a way that is independent of the object of desire.

This leads to the question: Is it possible for the concept of intention to also be specified in a logically coherent way? Maze argues that attempts to re-describe intentions in a deterministic and relational way “leave out an essential feature of what we ordinarily mean by saying that someone did B for a purpose, or on purpose, or intentionally” (1983, p. 33). That is, they leave out the element of free will and “intrinsic strivingness” towards a particular goal.

It may be possible however, to rehabilitate the concept of intentionality by jettisoning its voluntaristic aspects and recasting it in a sound logical form in accordance with Andersonian realist principles. Intention does seem to belong to the family of relationally defined propositional attitudes such as beliefs and desires. Beliefs do not have a strong motivational weighting. Emotions and desires have clear motivational implications. Intentions, however, are primarily conative. Like beliefs and desires, intentions can be conceived as sentient relationships between actors and states of affairs. Like beliefs and desires, intentions are “directed at” those states of affairs.

An example that Maze uses to illustrate the observability of mental processes presupposes some aspects of the concept of intention:

Suppose we are watching someone who has said he will make a cup of coffee if he can find the coffee jar. He opens the cupboard and directs his
gaze inside. We see that he thinks the coffee may be in the cupboard. (1983, p. 99)

If we understand this description of action, we understand it to be a reporting of intention. The action of opening the cupboard presupposes numerous tacit beliefs such as “The coffee is in the cupboard”, “The cupboard is not locked”, “I am able to open the cupboard” and “If I open the cupboard, I can start to make the coffee”. The coffee-seeking individual thus has beliefs and desires about coffee. But making coffee is a reflection of planned effort as well as belief and desire. As observers of someone making coffee, we typically assume that the coffee-makers actions are deliberately and sentiently directed at an object.

For Maze, however, talk of deliberateness or purpose raises problems associated with voluntarism. He correctly notes that talk of purpose and will in explanations of actions such as reaching for the coffee, is not helpful because it is incoherent to suppose that behaviour can emerge out of a causal vacuum. Maze argues that the concept of intention obscures the identification of the causes of behaviour. In the case of the coffee drinker, there are in fact numerous potential environmental and endogenous causes of coffee drinking, including memories of the rewarding effects of caffeine as well as the taste and aroma of the coffee. There is also the conditioning arising from repeated satiation of the hunger drive by coffee, milk and sugar.

In contrast to Maze (1983), Wegner (2002) argues that the identification of such causal factors is compatible with an approach which acknowledges the role of intention, including the sense of free will that accompanies the execution of ones intentions:

The idea of conscious will and the idea of psychological mechanisms have an oil and water relationship, having never been properly reconciled. One way to put them together . . . is to say that the mechanistic approach is the explanation preferred for scientific purposes but that the person’s experience of conscious will is utterly convincing and important to the person and so must be understood scientifically as well. The mechanisms underlying the experience of will are themselves a fundamental topic of scientific study . . .
This means, though, that conscious will is an illusion. It is an illusion in the sense that the experience of consciously willing an action is not a direct indication that the conscious thought has caused the action. (p. 2)

Wegner is correct to argue that the subjective sense of deliberateness in the actor’s experience does not mean that scientific investigations have to adopt at face value voluntaristic concepts such as free will or undetermined choice. However, Wegner is misguided in implying that conscious thoughts do not have a causal role. Beliefs about coffee, desires or cravings about coffee, and actions directed at coffee-making and drinking, are equivalent in their causal potential.

An examination of Cronkhite’s (1990) discussion of intentional action can serve to further clarify the notion of the directedness of intentions towards objects or states of affairs. Cronkhite objects to the concept of intention on the grounds that intentions are unobservable. While Cronkhite would prefer to avoid this concept, the following passage illustrates that he too cannot help but make use of it:

When the [primate] animal bares its teeth and a biting attack ensues, the baring can be presumed to have been preparatory to the attack, and thus a symptom. ‘Threat grimaces’, however— the baring of teeth when in fact no attack follows— must be placed within the range of semblances [iconic signs]. . . . When the animal has been threatened and produces a threat grimace without subsequent attack, interpretation is difficult, because one would need to get inside the mind of the animal to know the degree to which the grimace was preparatory for defence versus the extent to which it was bluff. I would prefer to back away from that example because I am loath to infer the intentions of humans, let alone animals”. (pp. 559-560)

The notion of the “preparatory baring of teeth” or “threat grimaces” presupposes a behaviour directed towards a particular goal and therefore intention. Cronkhite’s reluctance to speak of intentions is natural given the positivist or behaviourist complaint about the lack of observability of mental states and the warning about speculating about what is in “the black box”. A weakness in Cronkhite’s position is that intention, as one of the propositional attitudes (belief, desire, wanting etc), falls outside of the framework of the model because it is thought of as being “inside” the mind. Yet there is no reason to think of intentions differently to other
mental processes. The realist framework adopted here is consistent with the argument that all types of mental processes may be observable because they consist of a particular kind of person-environment relationship rather than being “inside the brain”. Hence intentions are open to observation because they are relationships between brain processes (particularly those involved in motivation or conation), and objective states of affairs. Moreover, the fact that mental processes are “directed at” objects, does not set humans and animals apart from the laws of nature or the study of mental processes from a deterministic scientific perspective.

If the concept of intention can be rehabilitated in this way, then a significant corpus of scholarship and research in the fields of pragmatics and psychology becomes available for building a realist psychosemiotic model. The work of authors such as H. P. Grice (1957) in philosophy, Sperber and Wilson (1986) in cognitive psychology and B. F. Malle (2004) in social cognition can be used to illustrate the applications of the concept of intention.

1.4.2. The explanatory power of the concept of intention

Morris (2001) notes that the conception of intention has received attention from developmental psychologists and philosophers rather than social psychologists: “A core idea among philosophers and developmentalists is that perceptions of intention are pivotal in social understanding. Yet social psychologists have only focused intermittently on inferences about the actor's intentions” (p. 150). Philosophical contributions to pragmatics (Grice, 1957; Austin, 1962; Habermas, 1984) have been especially useful in elaborating the concept of intention. These scholars have recognised that communication is a form of action involving the inference of intentions.

Grice (1957) developed the distinction between natural and non-natural meaning and argued that natural meaning is intention-independent while non-natural meaning is intention-dependent. He gave as an example of a natural sign (which Peirce would call an index) the phenomenon of dark clouds suggesting
that rain is coming. The relationship between dark clouds and rain is a dyadic causal relationship. It is not a meaning relationship or semiotic relationship until it becomes a part of a triadic relationship involving a knowing agent. While it is true that dark clouds are empirically associated with rain whether we believe them to indicate rain or not, it is only when we make the connection between dark clouds and rain, that a meaning relation emerges.

The role of intention in Grice’s conception of non-natural meaning is more straightforward. For example, the sign made by clenching one’s fist and pointing the thumb upwards, signifying “okay” or “approval” in some cultures, is intention-dependent because (a) members of the culture have set up a convention about what the thumb pointing up signifies, (b) individual uses of the thumb sign are typically intentional (rather than say, accidental) and, (c) the communicator relies on the audience’s recognition of his intentions in displaying this sign to get his message across.

All conventional systems are originally dependent on human intentions in that they are developed and maintained by means of collective action. The reverse is not the case, however. Not all intention-dependent signs involve conventions or codes. Sperber and Wilson (1986) give the example of someone displaying a bottle of aspirin in order to signify that she has a headache. There is no convention that links the display of the aspirin tablets with the meaning “I have a headache”. Rather, the link is created, in a “one off” fashion, by the communicator. The classification of signs suggested by the work of these authors is as follows:
**Table 1: Grice’s classification of signs**
(Grice, 1957; Sperber & Wilson, 1986)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>“Natural” meaning</th>
<th>“Non-natural meaning”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Conventional (code-based)</td>
<td>Non-conventional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Linguistic</td>
<td>Non-linguistic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dark cloud =</td>
<td>“cow” =</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rain could be coming</td>
<td>Action of thumb pointing upwards = Approval</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Action of displaying aspirin bottle = Headache</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Grice’s analysis of intention in meaning and communication was taken up by Daniel Dennett. Dennett (1987) used his analysis of levels of intentionality involved in human and animal communication to refine a framework for field research in animal communication. This was part of a movement away from the investigation of the question of whether primates could understand grammar in favour of an approach which investigates the degree to which primates, when communicating, rely on the audience’s recognition of their communicative intentions. Dennett argues that the determination of the level of intentionality at which an animal was capable of operating should become the new defining criterion of an animal’s language and communicative abilities. Seyfarth & Cheney’s (2003) summary of relevant research, discussed above, also supports the conclusion that the recognition of intention and other mental states is a crucial factor separating human and animal communication.

In contrast to communication-like behaviour in animals, ascriptions of intentions are crucial in human communication and human social practice generally. For example, whether someone is judged to have committed a crime accidentally or on purpose is an important distinction in legal contexts. Malle
(2004) summarises research in the field of social cognition which illustrates the role of the concept of intention in folk explanations of events. He notes that while the following explanations have a similar linguistic structure, the first describes intentional behaviour and the second describes unintentional behaviour:

1. Anne studied for the test all day because she wanted to do well.
2. Anne was worrying about the test results because she wanted to do well.

The first example suggests that Anne was acting in a deliberate fashion and studying because she wanted to do well in her test. The second example implies that Anne was not acting deliberately but was reacting with worry because she wanted to do well in her test. We would not normally say someone was deliberately worrying. Worrying implies an unwelcome reaction to circumstances not within an individual’s control. We could say that Anne was overtaken by worry. Malle’s emphasis on the role of the deliberateness in conceptualisations of behaviour does not preclude alternative accounts which emphasise beliefs and desires. Thus, in the case above, Anne might be caused to worry because she desires a good test result and believes that she cannot do well in the test. Malle (2004) nevertheless points to the salience of the intentional/non-intentional distinction:

English speakers beyond the age of four will understand that Anne studied in order to do well, that she chose to study, that she studied for the reason stated, namely that she wanted to do well. These are familiar but far from trivial inferences. They characterise Anne as a thinking, reasoning, planning agent, as someone who chooses what to do in light of what she wants and believes will happen. None of these inferences hold in [2]. There, Anne’s worrying is simply caused by her desire to do well; no reasoning, planning, no choice is involved. (pp. 90-91)

In summary, intention in the sense of deliberate action and intentionality in the sense of directed action and thought are overlapping constructs useful to the development of a triadic understanding of semiosis. Moreover, these concepts are readily defined in a realist way. For Anderson there was no gulf between intention and causality: “Whatever may be peculiar about the working of purpose or
intention, it is not anything of a special logical type, not any peculiar kind of causality” (Anderson, 1932, Lecture 24).

Another advantage of Anderson’s conceptualisation of causality is that it goes beyond the “billiard ball” conception of cause and effect to emphasise the modulating influence of the context (or field, as Anderson called it) on the causal relationship. Thus “A may be necessary and sufficient for the occurrence of A within the field X, and yet not be necessary or sufficient for its occurrence within the field Y” (1938, p. 11). The field or context includes, but is not limited to, the features of a person involved in a causal relationship.

Thus, what makes me angry may leave you quite indifferent, but this does not mean that there are not perfectly definite conditions of the occurrence of anger in me. Further, it does not mean that there are not definite conditions of the occurrence of anger in men; for what is necessary and sufficient for its occurrence in this wider field must be necessary and sufficient for its occurrence in me, and in you, as part of the field, but what is necessary and sufficient for its occurrence in me may not be necessary and sufficient for its occurrence in other men. (1938, p. 11)

1.5 SUMMARY

The realist understanding of semiosis outlined so far is encapsulated by the paradigm of someone using something to stand for something else. There are three key aspects of this conceptualisation: It is relational, triadic, and focuses on semiosis as a type of action. Action is a causal phenomenon in that it is motivated by characteristics of the semiotic agent and influenced by features of the context or field in which the agent acts. The causal context/field can include psychological as well as social, cultural, and other factors.

The triadic conceptualisation of semiosis is built upon a dyadic conceptualisation of mental processes where someone knows something else. This relational conceptualisation of mental processes implies a separation of the knower and the known. In contrast to idealism and representationism, realism, in its Andersonian formulation, provides a thoroughgoing focus on the logical
independence of the knower and the known. Anderson’s analysis can be profitably extended to encompass the logical separation of the knower, the known and the semiotic tools that the knower uses. In other words, Anderson’s relational conception of mind in turn facilitates a triadic relational understanding of semiosis. When the relationship between the sign user and signifiers is examined from a realist perspective, action and intention emerge as key concepts. These component relationships of semiosis can only be understood in the context of the semiotic triad. The realist approach to semiosis suggests that psychology is relevant to the investigation of semiotic phenomena. Realism can also provide a framework for a critical evaluation of research in psychology and in the social sciences that is potentially relevant to semiotics.
CHAPTER 2: SEMIOSIS IN PSYCHOLOGY AND THE SOCIAL SCIENCES

Two broadly contrasting approaches in psychology and the social sciences are the quantitative and the qualitative approaches. These do not just reflect different methodologies, but, as will become clear, they also encompass contrasting philosophical assumptions and cultures, or traditions, of research. In order to reflect this, I refer to the quantitative-empirical and the qualitative-interpretative approaches. A realist approach has much to offer as a foundation for a critical examination and integration of these approaches. In contrast to the realist approach adopted here, the quantitative-empirical tradition commonly embraces instrumentalist and representationist principles while the qualitative-interpretative approach often embraces idealist and relativist principles.

2.1. SEMIOSIS AND QUANTITATIVE PSYCHOLOGY

The dominant current in modern psychology, the quantitative-empirical approach, leaves little room for semiosis. The quest for measurability, which is part of the quantitative-empirical Zeitgeist, relies on an instrumentalist philosophy of science. This instrumentalist philosophy in turn supports a methodological approach involving the decontextualisation and operationalisation of variables.

In the behaviourist strand of the quantitative-empirical tradition, variables are generally operationalised according to a narrowly conceived notion of observable behaviour, or in terms of stimulus-response relationships. In the cognitivist strand of this tradition, variables are generally operationalised according to a misconceived notion of cognitive processes based on a computer metaphor. In cognitivist approaches, operationalism manifests itself in a focus on input-output relationships to the exclusion of meaning relationships. Fortunately, there are also niches within the quantitative-empirical tradition that contain conceptualisations of semiotic phenomena compatible with a realist philosophy of
science, and a relational conceptualisation of mental and semiotic processes. The work of Markel (1997) stands out as an example.

2.1.1. Instrumentalism and operationalism

Instrumentalism is a pragmatic approach to research in that a prototypical instrumentalist scientist does not focus too much on deciding whether a concept is true or false, or whether it represents situations in reality. The instrumentalist scientist instead concerns himself or herself with determining whether a concept is effective or ineffective. One way in which the instrumentalist philosophy has manifested itself in quantitative-empirical psychology is in its operationalist methodology. Operationalism means that concepts are defined by means of the technical operations used to investigate them. For example, a concept such as stress can be defined in terms of a set of operations to measure heart rate, electrical conductivity of the skin, blood pressure, pulse rate, and breathing rate. Thus, it has been established that people with healthy hearts and low-stress lifestyles tend to have a heartbeat that varies with their breathing pattern. In these individuals, the heart beats slightly faster when the person is breathing in and slightly slower when they are breathing out. In contrast, a person who is not coping as well with stress is more likely to exhibit a reduced variability in their heartbeat; their heartbeat is more like a metronome (Sharpley, 2002). Hence, the concept of stress can be operationalised in terms of measures of heart rate variability.

One danger of such an approach is that the concept of stress is thereby limited to its easily observable, or measurable, manifestations. There are some concepts related to stress, however, that are not easily measurable. Kobasa, Maddi, & Kahn, (1982) demonstrated that business executives who coped better with stress felt more deeply committed to the activities in their lives, believed that they could control events, and perceived change as a positive challenge. Phenomena such as feelings of commitment, beliefs about control, and emotional attitudes to change are more difficult to operationalise than the physiological
correlates of these phenomena. An approach where there is an over-investment in the operationalist methodology would therefore be at risk of ignoring beliefs and emotions, which are also important to the understanding of stress.

Another example of operationalism at work is the construct of intelligence, which has been defined as a set of responses to a set of standardised questions asking the individual to solve problems presented in verbal or non-verbal format. The correct responses are then summed to represent various degrees or quantities of intelligence. Intelligence traits have even been defined in terms of the psychometric scales used to measure intelligence. Hiser & Francis (2000) note the long history of the partially ironic phrase “intelligence is what the intelligence tests measure”.

Attaining measurability by means of operationalisation has fuelled the proliferation of psychological research because it facilitates data analysis as well as data collection. When a construct is operationalised, it is translated into the language of concrete measurement procedures. The emphasis on measurement along with the adoption of experimental methods, are the two factors which have most helped quantitative-empirical psychology achieve a secure and well-defined institutional position, even if, as Michell (2004) notes, many of the variables are assumed to be quantitative without adequate grounds.

The realist approach to measurement requires that a variable is demonstrably quantitative in order to allow for its measurement. Variables that are not quantitative in nature cannot be converted into quantities by the mere application of numbers. Yet this is what happened in the quantitative-empirical tradition of psychology when it adopted S. S. Stevens’ operationalist definition of measurement as “the assignment of numerals to objects or events according to rules (1946, p. 667, quoted in Michell, 1986, p. 403). Hence there is a danger in operationalism (and more broadly, in instrumentalism) of incorrectly attributing a quantitative nature to objects, events, or states of affairs.
In the behaviourist tradition, operationalisation was facilitated by a focus on easily observable aspects of behaviour. This was concomitant with a neglect of cognitive processes, which were regarded as either unobservable or non-existent. The neglect of cognition spurred the “cognitive revolution”. One of the aims of the cognitive revolution was to restore cognitive processes to their rightful place in the centre of psychology. A closer examination of the cognitive revolution reveals that the overriding quest for operationalisation in the cognitive tradition was in fact incompatible with the study of mental processes. The view that the “cognitive revolution” has led to the overthrow of behaviourism belies the continuity between these approaches, as they are both based on an operationalist methodology and share similar key assumptions (Bruner, 1990; Miller, 2003).

The cognitive revolution, beginning in the 1950s, has either gained equal prominence with the behavioural school (Friman, Allen, Kerwin & Larzelere, 1993) or displaced the behavioural school (Robins, Gosling & Craik, 1999). Jerome Bruner, one of the architects of the cognitive revolution, noted that the initial stage of the revolution was:

An all-out effort to establish meaning as the central concept of psychology. . . . It focused upon the symbolic activities that human beings employed in constructing and making sense not only of the world, but also of themselves. Its aim was to prompt psychology to join forces with its sister interpretive disciplines in the humanities and in the social sciences. (Bruner, 1990, p. 2)

Bruner argues that the interpretative revolution has continued beneath the surface of the cognitive revolution. This is probably because mainstream psychology failed to capture interpretative phenomena, such as semiosis, in its explanatory frameworks. Other authors (such as Smith, Harre, & Van Langenhove, 1995 and Potter, 1996) have made similar observations. Bruner notes that the cognitive revolution was “diverted into issues that are marginal to the impulse that brought it into being” (1990, p. 1). In Bruner’s words,

Some critics, perhaps unkindly, even argue that the new cognitive science, the child of the revolution, has gained its technical success at the price of
dehumanising the very concept of mind that it had sought to re-establish in psychology, and that it has thereby estranged much of psychology from the other human sciences and the humanities. (1990, p. 1)

Not long after a focus on cognition gained the ascendancy, the quantitative-empirical tradition became strongly influenced by the information processing, or computer, model of mind. The information processing model aims to explain cognition in terms of brain processes or, following Turing (1950), in terms of processes that could be instantiated in brains. Input to a system is conceived in terms of a causal chain where stimuli or information arrays lead to brain events. The semantic content of these stimuli is often irrelevant in information processing models. Fodor (1985) for example, has argued that the way forward in conceptualising mental processes is to “combine the RTM [representational theory of mind] with the ‘computer metaphor’” (p. 93). The result is a conception of mind as a “syntax-driven machine” (p. 94).

To claim that the mind is a ‘syntax driven machine’ is precisely to hold that the theory of mental processes can be set out in its entirety without reference to any of the semantic properties of mental states. (Fodor, 1985, p. 94)

Fodor argues that thoughts are represented in the mind by means of linguistic symbols rather than by means of the visual images or “ideas” postulated by British empiricists such as Hume. Fodor argues that computers provide clues on how to “connect semantical with causal properties for symbols” (1985, p. 93). These semantic properties, he argues, can be studied in terms of syntax, which is in turn equivalent to the physical “shape” of these symbols. Fodor states that since syntactic relations “mimic” semantic relations, we can explain intelligence in terms of a mental syntax:

The semantic relation that holds between two symbols when the proposition expressed by the one is implied by the proposition expressed by the other can be mimicked by syntactic relations in virtue of which one of the symbols is derivable from the other. We can therefore build machines that have . . . the following property: the operations of such a machine consist entirely of transformations of symbols; in the course of performing these operations, the machine is sensitive only to the syntactic properties of the
symbols; and the operations that the machine performs on the symbols are entirely confined to alterations of their shapes. (p. 1985, 93)

This illustrates Fodor’s strategy of reducing semantics to syntax, in that he postulates a machine sensitive only to the syntactic aspect of symbols. Such a formulation is inconsistent with the logical requirement of the triadic nature of signs and symbols. When Fodor speaks of symbols he is in fact speaking only about one part of the symbol, namely the signifier or vehicle for the symbol. When he speaks about semantic relationships, he is not referring to meaning relationships but to formal relationships between signifiers. Fodor attempts to explain semantic processes in terms of non-semantic processes, but ends up using the semantic concept of mimesis (syntactic relations are said to “mimic” semantic relations) to explain semantic processes. Harnad (1995) notes that attempts to reduce semantics to syntax in this way suffer from the “symbol grounding problem”. This problem arises because the interpretation of symbol systems cannot be intrinsic to the system. Rather, the interpretation is generated by an external interpreter. Failure to recognise this results in the unwitting assumption of a homunculus that does the interpreting.

Heil (1981) notes that attempts by representationist theorists of cognition to escape the pitfall of infinite regress by postulating intrinsically meaningful systems of symbols are fundamentally flawed. Fodor’s approach, for example, is to argue that humans are like computers, in that both have internal properties that are representational or symbolic. As Heil explains, however, the sense in which computer language could have meaning is parasitic “on its relation to a suitable programming language” (1981, p. 331) which in turn depends on the language-using programmer. Since the programmer “provides an essential link between states of the machine and states of affairs in the world” (p. 332), the use of the computational metaphor for cognition is called into question:

The continued use of a computing machine model would, if my hunch is correct, involve the tacit introduction of an homunculus in the form of a programmer who bestows meaning on the states and operations of the device he oversees. . . . Such states have meaning, if at all, roughly in the
same way that marks on paper have meaning: they have been given a meaning by human beings. (Heil, 1981, p. 332)

In other words, the “mental representations” postulated in information processing models are not entities that an individual can know or find meaningful. As Bruner (1990) puts it:

Information is indifferent with respect to meaning. . . . Information processing inscribes messages at or fetches them from an address in memory on instructions from a central control unit, or holds [them] temporarily in a buffer store, and then manipulates them in prescribed ways: it lists, orders, combines, compares pre-coded information. The system that does all of these things is blind with respect to whether what is stored is words from Shakespeare’s sonnets or numbers from a random number table. (p. 4)

One might treat the signifiers in people’s brains or in computers, as if they were mathematical symbols. Various computing or mathematical operations could then be performed on these signifiers. However the relationship between these signifiers and states of affairs cannot be reduced to these mathematical operations. The general point is that semiotic relationships, like mental relationships, are phenomena that cannot be captured by models of processes that subserve these relationships.

Individuals in whom brain processes are located cannot directly know their brain processes, nor can these brain processes have intrinsic meaning. These brain processes are only observable for neurological and cognitive scientists studying brains and perceptual systems. If a particular set of neurones fire each time a light is presented in an individual’s visual field and a brain scientist is able to observe the event, the neuronal activity can serve as a signifier of the light. However, the neuron firing cannot be a signifier for the individual being observed. Even if one of the brain scientist’s recording instruments is observed by the individual being investigated and thereby becomes a kind of biofeedback device, it is not the neuronal activity that acts as a signifier for the participant, but its visual or auditory environmental correlate (cf. Maze, 1983).
In short, information-processing models of cognition conflate processes that are meaningful to the individual and processes that are *meaningless* to the individual. This conflation is concomitant with a conflation of two senses of *information*. In one sense, information is seen as a quality of a stimulus array in the environment or as a coded representation of that stimulus array in a computer or a brain. Thus, if Jane sees the fruit sitting in the bowl, this complex stimulus can be coded using “bits” of information. The mathematician John W. Tukey coined the term *Bit* as an abbreviation of *binary digit* (Shannon & Weaver, 1963). A bit can hold two values: 0 or 1. The fruit bowl can be coded as 1 if it contains fruit and 0 if it does not. These codes are meaningless to computers just as the neural codes in individuals’ nervous systems are meaningless to individuals.

A coherent use of the term *information* is the sense where *something* is informative (or meaningful) to *someone*, or in the semiotic sense where *something* is informative (or meaningful) to *someone* because it stands for, or represents, *something else*. This logically coherent *relational* concept of information is incommensurate with notions of information being a *quality* of a stimulus array or a quality of an individual’s brain. As Petocz (1999) notes, a meaning *relation* cannot be reduced to a *quality*; nothing can be *intrinsically* meaningful or informative. As suggested earlier, one possible reason that modern psychology has not embraced the relational conceptualisation of information or semiosis is that it does not fit with a research approach where variables are operationalised, quantified, and measured. Meaning is relatively difficult to deal with because it is not a property but a relation, and not obviously quantitative or measurable.

While it is popular to talk about the “cognitive revolution” superseding behaviourism, this belies the continuity between the two movements. Bruner noted that:

The old [stimulus-response] learning theorist and associationist student of memory could come right back into the fold of the cognitive revolution so long as they wrapped their old concepts in the new terms of information processing. One did not have to truck with mental processes or with meaning at all. In place of stimuli and responses, there was input and output,
with reinforcement laundered of its affective taint by being converted into a control element that fed information about the outcome of an operation back into the system. (1990, p. 7)

Similarly, Miller (2003) noted the compatibility of Claude Shannon’s information theory (one of the early manifestations of the cognitive revolution), with stimulus-response approaches. Miller also noted the interchangeability of information processing and behaviourist concepts: “Perception became discrimination, memory became learning, language became verbal behaviour, and intelligence became what intelligence tests test” (p. 141).

The continuity between stimulus-response and information processing approaches is partially driven by the methodological demands common to both. As was the case with behaviourist approaches, the phenomena investigated in cognitive psychology are decontextualised and operationalised in order that they may be measured:

Consider a father who never expresses love or praise, thereby causing his son to grow up with a set of perfectionist behaviour patterns always striving to win the approval of potential father/authority figures. These early childhood dynamics can be viewed as “programming” or “software” providing instructions for how various cognitive units (“hardware”) are to process new information derived from the son’s social interactions with peers and authority figures along with information stored in memory. In this way cognitive psychology seeks to make such behaviours understandable, quantifiable, and measurable. (Bishop, 2005, p. 152)

Bishop’s placement of the terms *programming*, *software*, and *hardware* within quotation marks suggests that these terms have a somewhat metaphoric quality. This supports Bruner’s observation that computers are “blind with respect to whether what is stored is words from Shakespeare’s sonnets or numbers from a random number table” (1990, p. 4). Even if computers were not blind in this sense, it would be worthwhile asking, as Bishop (2005) does, whether anything is added to psychological explanations of phenomena such as an individual’s attitude to authority figures, by the use of computer concepts. It would have to be demonstrated that these concepts are doing more than describing, in different
language, the relationship between an individual’s experience of an emotionally
distant father and the individual’s subsequent desire to please authority figures.

2.1.2. An unsound quantitative-empirical approach

Michon, Jackson, Leiden & Jorna (2003) conducted a review of the semiotic
aspects of psychology. They limited their review to the information processing or
cognitive science paradigm. Due to conceptual problems within this paradigm,
their analysis of mental processes and semiosis is doomed from the start. Michon
et al. begin by claiming to use the concept of sign or symbol in its everyday sense,
but simultaneously jettison conventional signs from their discussion.

The term “symbol” is here meant as equivalent to “sign”. Within cognitive
psychology, “symbol” is an unproblematic term not sharing any
connotations with the Peircian notion of symbol, that is, a conventional or
cultural relation between sign and object. (Michon, et al., 2003, p. 2728)

This represents a misunderstanding of Peirce’s conceptualisation of the symbol,
which is closely tied to the mental act of interpretation, with convention playing a
secondary role. The key concepts that Peirce discusses, interpretation and
understanding, are much broader than the conventional codes that can support
interpretation and understanding. Peirce stated that symbols are signs that stand
for their objects “essentially because they will be so interpreted” (1908/1991, p.
270). He gives as an example a speech utterance that signifies something “only by
virtue of its being understood to have that signification” (1901/1991, p. 240). The
psychological nature of Peirce’s formulation of the symbol is further indicated in
his claim that a symbol is a type of sign “that will be interpreted as denoting the
object in consequence of a habit” (1906/1991, p. 251). Once again, it should be
noted that the concept of habit is quite different to the concept of convention. For
Peirce, symbols are signs “whose relation to their objects is an imputed character”
(1867/1991, p. 30), meaning that there is at least one human agent doing the
imputing—with or without the use of a conventional code.
Further problems are exhibited in the Michon et al. reductionist approach to the concept of communication. This is illustrated in their discussion of A. Newell’s classification of “communication between components” (p. 2724) of information processing systems, such as brains and computers, according to processing speed:

At the bottom of the scale we appear to be dealing with the functions studied by neuropsychology (10 milliseconds), whereas higher levels can be characterised as elementary automatic skills (100 milliseconds), deliberate action (1 second), and rational behaviour (10 seconds and more). (Michon et al., 2003, p. 2724)

While this is an interesting proposition, there are problems with classing the phenomena discussed by Newell as communication. The communication that is said to occur in the nervous system, or in the information processing models constructed by psychologists and other cognitive scientists, is very different to the communication that occurs between individuals. The “communication” between components of the nervous system that Michon et al. discuss is communication in a metaphoric, rather than literal, sense. The same is true of the concept of information. It may be true, in a metaphoric sense, that a nerve cell carries information and communicates that information to another nerve cell. However, what is literally happening is that electrochemical impulses are being relayed between one nerve cell and another. This is far removed from the triadic relationship at the heart of semiosis and communication.

The “information” processes to which Michon et al. refer could be described in terms of Peirce’s category of the index or Grice’s non-natural meaning—a sign involving a causal relationship between signifier and signified. A causal relationship only becomes an indexical sign if it is perceived as such or taken as such. So too, the causal processes in the nervous system are only informative for someone who can observe them from the outside. While there is no information or communication in the nervous system, neuroscientists may interpret the causal effects in the nervous system as indexical signs.
The potential for speaking in metaphoric, or anthropomorphic, terms about physical processes, such as those in the nervous system, is illustrated in Dennett (1987) by means of a conversation he had with his electrician. Dennett’s electrician told him that the best way to protect oneself from electrocution was to set up the electrical wiring in a home in such a way as to *trick* the electricity into *finding* a quick path into the ground. Dennett argued that the electrician’s explanation was an example of the use of concepts that assume intentionality to explain a physical phenomenon.

Dennett proposed that we can explain phenomena from a *physical*, *functional* or *intentional* perspective, regardless of the substantive nature of the entities and processes being described. Hence these three perspectives can be applied to systems of various levels of complexity: from electrical currents, to the nervous system, to the mind. From the point of view of the *physical stance*, systems such as computers or people are describable in terms of the laws of physics and chemistry. From the point of view of the *design stance*, systems can be described in terms of how their component parts function. For example, it could be argued that the function of a person’s thumb is to oppose the four fingers. From an *intentional stance*, the scientist attributes beliefs, desires, and rationality to a system. Thus it could be argued that the thumb *wants* to support the fingers in their collective *goal* of grasping. In Dennett’s framework, the question of whether entities such as thumbs and electricity actually do have beliefs and desires is put aside. For the sake of explanatory utility, these entities are treated as if they had beliefs and desires.

Michon et al. (2003) attempt to reduce mental phenomena, which have the hallmark of intentionality, to the design stance. Michon et al. erroneously argue that phenomena such as people’s knowledge and beliefs about the world, their sign use, and communication, can be framed in functional or computational terms. The authors argue that:

> Computational theories are in principle confined to the functional level. This implies in the first place that intentional states of mind, propositional
attitudes, emotional states, and “mental images” are reduced to the functional level as much as possible. (Michon et al., 2003, p. 2734)

Their functional concepts become saturated, however, with the intentional concepts they are trying to explain or “reduce”. As a result, they refer to the nervous system or computational system as if it were an intentional system, without recognising this is a metaphoric way of speaking. Michon et al. speak of the semiotics of the nervous system in a literal sense. Most adults know that it is not literally true that we can *trick* electricity into finding the quickest way to the ground. Similarly, it would be a loose or metaphoric way of speaking to say that functional components of the brain could be tricked or that these components are communicating with one another.

Even if mental processes are essentially mental *relationships* between a person and their environment, this relationship cannot be reduced to processes that occur in a person’s brain. Similarly, the phenomenon of semiosis is essentially a relationship between a person, signifier and states of affairs in the environment. Therefore, semiosis cannot be reduced to the so-called “symbolic” and “communicative” relationships within the person’s brain. While investigation of central nervous system processes can *inform* the investigation of mental processes, it should not be mistaken as *equivalent* to the study of mental processes (cf. Maze, 1983).

Michon et al., (2003) nevertheless argue that the computer, or information processing, metaphor currently popular in some branches of cognitive psychology is superior to previous metaphors whose usefulness has expired. They claim that, in contrast to the defunct metaphors of the clock, the steam engine and the telephone switchboard, the computer represents “a much more principled” (p. 2727) choice:

Rather than just being a suitable metaphor for dressing up our ideas about the mind and its workings, the computer is now recognised as being a close relative: humans, animals, and computers are species in the class of
cognitive systems, capable of behaving intelligently, or rationally, under a variety of circumstances. (Michon et al., 2003, p. 2727)

Irrespective of the problem of the current dearth of computers that are actually capable of acting like humans or animals, in the sense of using their beliefs to fulfil their desires, the computer model encourages the misleading view that computer pulses (and by analogy, nerve impulses) carry information which is communicated between one part of the system and another in the same sense as communication between individuals. The crucial difference is that while individuals can perceive the signifiers they use in communication, computers do not perceive their electrical pulses. Similarly, organisms do not perceive or know their nerve impulses, or any other elements of their central nervous system. When Michon et al. state that the physical symbol systems of the brain “represent external and internal conditions, objects, and events in symbol structures” (2003, p. 2728), a pertinent question that follows from this assertion is: “For whom do these symbol systems represent states of affairs?” Certainly not for the individuals who own the brains, for they cannot perceive the physical systems that are said to populate their brains. Michon’s et al. conceptualisation can only be valid in a metaphoric sense because the authors are treating causal connections (or postulated causal connections) as if they stood in a symbolic as well as causal relationship. In short, Michon et al. fail to make a clear separation between the subject who uses signifiers, the signifiers themselves, and the states of affairs to which the subject refers. They conflate the subject’s cognitive links to the world with pseudo-cognitive and pseudo-communicative physiological relations in the subject’s brain.

In attempting to fit the concept of sign into a cognitivist or “information processing” framework, Michon et al. begin by stripping the concept of sign of its conventional aspects. Ironically, they also strip the concept of symbol of its cognitive aspects. They omit key concepts such as sign interpretation and understanding. Their conceptualisation exhibits some of the conceptual pitfalls that are easily avoided in a realist semiotic enterprise—namely, the reduction of mental processes, including semiotic processes, to brain processes. The realist
relational conceptualisation of mental processes advocated here focuses on semiosis itself while remaining open to research findings on the physiological architecture that *subserve* semiosis.

2.1.3. A sound quantitative-empirical approach

The logically flawed approach of Michon and his colleagues can be contrasted with a sounder approach from the quantitative-empirical tradition. While the treatment of meaning phenomena in this tradition is generally poor, the work of Markel (1997) represents an exception. This is because Markel subscribes neither to the flawed representationist position of Michon et al., nor to the marginalisation and narrow operationalisation of meaning phenomena that generally characterise the quantitative-empirical tradition.

According to Markel (1997), the primary task of what he calls “semiotic psychology” is to investigate phenomena such as non-verbal behaviour and speech as indices of psychological phenomena such as stereotypes, attitudes, prejudices, motivations, interpersonal needs, and personality traits. For Markel, “it is the inclusion of emotions and attitudes that differentiates semiotic psychology from closely related disciplines (for example, psycholinguistics, neurolinguistics, and anthropological linguistics)” (1997, p. 157). Markel laments the paucity of research drawing on the combined resources of the fields of psychology and semiotics. He notes that the terms *semiotic* and *psychology* rarely appear together: “An examination of current literature will not find a similar juxtaposition of these words and phrases contiguously in one chapter or article, let alone one paragraph” (1997, p. 157).

Markel notes that people can become aware of various linguistic and paralinguistic indices, and this awareness has causal efficacy. He gives the hypothetical example of a woman becoming aware of indices of aggressive and violent behaviour in a male:
The man who attacks a woman he knows, has probably emitted linguistic and paralinguistic signs that were clues to the subsequent attack. Sexist speech signs were present and perceived by the unfortunate woman, but she never really asked herself: “what do I feel like when he uses sexist words or condescending voice qualities?” . . . If it is asked, and the answer is “not good”, the woman has a powerful bit of information in that she knows what is on the mind of the man. (pp. 29-30)

As a result of her awareness, she would be in a better position to protect herself from an assault. This example illustrates the interaction of causes, which are the primary focus in the quantitative-interpretive tradition, and reasons, which receive greater attention in the qualitative-interpretive tradition. The woman interprets certain behaviours she notices in the man as indices of sexist attitudes and uses these to predict that she is at risk of violence. This in turn causes her to avoid him. This suggests that there is no gulf between reasons and causes, since reasons have causal efficacy and causes can, in some circumstances, be the objects of reasoning.

Markel argues that two features of unconscious indexical signifiers are immanent reference and psychic determinism. Immanent reference means mental reference to the immediate situation or context. Another aspect of immanent reference is the inability to dissemble in this mode.

You can for instance say, “I like what you’re saying”. However, while uttering those words you may emit paralinguistic behaviour that indicates, “I don’t like what you’re saying”. In one way or another, our observable behaviour indicates our thoughts about the here-and-now. (Markel, 1997, p. 27)

Markel uses the term psychic determinism in the same sense as Sigmund Freud used it. According to Markel, “an implication of this principle is that there is no such thing as an accidental indexical speech sign. The speaker may be sorry and not have intended to utter a particular word, but that unintended act has a cause and is related to some mental state” (1997, p. 28). It should be noted, however, that while all behaviour has causal antecedents, not all slips are motivated by psychological factors such as unconscious conflicts. Hence it is important to
distinguish between purely mechanical slips of the tongue and “Freudian” slips of the tongue. It is also important to note that Freud did not just discuss emotionally motivated verbal slips but more generally slips in action, or parapraxes, as he called them (Freud, 1901/1992).

Markel’s example of sexist indices also illustrates the importance of the triadic conceptualisation of the sign. In the example discussed above, sexist cues in speech indicate misogynist beliefs and attitudes as well as permissive attitudes towards violence. These cues only become indexical signifiers if they are noticed and taken as signifiers of these beliefs and attitudes. In other words, the interpreter is required for something to count as semiosis. Such an analysis is consistent with the field of medical diagnosis, where the patient’s self-reported or subjective complaints are termed symptoms, while the physician’s diagnosis is based on objective medical signifiers, or indices, of illness (Nessa, 1996; Malterud, 1999). The patient’s symptoms only begin to signify that something is wrong if the patient notices them and understands the concept of illness. If the patient does not know which illness the symptoms refer to, he or she relies on the medical practitioner to diagnose their illness. The patient’s symptoms only become indices of a medical condition if someone interprets them as such. The physician’s act of interpretation is often guided by accumulated knowledge, examination of the sufferer, and laboratory investigations.

Following Morris (1946), Markel also regards conditioned reflexes as indices. An example of a conditioned reflex is a dog salivating in response to the sound of a buzzer that has historically been paired with the delivery of food in the dog’s presence. In Morris’ view, the buzzer in this context is said to serve as an indexical signifier of food because it controls behaviour in the same way that the food controls behaviour, namely, by eliciting salivation. It is important to note that causal relationships such as these do not, by themselves, constitute semiosis. An essential element in a semiotic relationship is an agent who recognises the cause-effect relationship and uses it in signification. The dyadic causal relationship does not become a semiotic relationship until it becomes part of a
triadic relationship involving an interpreter. Hence it is important that indexes are also conceptualised as triadic relations.

While acknowledging that triadic nature of semiosis, Peirce argued that it is possible to classify signs according to the relationship between the signifier and the signified. Thus in the case of iconic signs the relationship between the signifier and signified is one of resemblance. In the case of indices, the relationship is one of causality or spatiotemporal contiguity; in the case of the symbol, the signifier and signified are connected by habit:

Every sign is determined by its object, either first, by partaking in the characters of the object, when I call the sign an icon; secondly, by being really and in its individual existence connected with the individual object, when I call the sign an index; thirdly, by more or less approximate certainty that it will be interpreted as denoting the object, in consequence of a habit (which term I use as including a natural disposition), when I call the sign a symbol. (Peirce, 1906/1991, p. 251)

While Peirce emphasised the psychological factor of habit in the case of symbols, it is important to note that all signs rely on some kind of interpretive act, not just symbols. Whether there is a causal, mimetic, or arbitrary relationship between two elements, there is no sign unless an observer imputes a relationship between the two elements. The sign is born of a mental act whereby one element is perceived to stand for, or represent, another.

The following hypothetical case scenario from Markel (1997) can be used to illustrate some of these processes by which causal relationships become implicated in sign relationships. Jane regularly switches the lights off before she leaves her house. Her purpose is to save on electricity bills and to reduce her contribution to greenhouse gas emissions. Burglars watching Jane’s house might hypothesise that the fact of lights being off in her home at night is an index of Jane’s absence from the house. However, it is only when the burglars or Jane make such a connection that the absence or presence of lights becomes an indexical signifier. A mental act is essential for the light to serve as an index.
Elaborating on this hypothetical scenario, Jane’s home is burgled and her plasma television is stolen. She then forms the hypothesis that if she switches off her lights, this indicates to burglars that she is out of the house and that the house is therefore easier to rob. Jane then begins purposely to leave the lights on when she leaves home as a signalling strategy. It is worth repeating that the states of affairs where the lights are on or off only become indexical signifiers if they are noticed by someone and taken as signifiers of something else. Once Jane makes such a connection, she begins to leave the lights on when she leaves home in order to potentially deceive burglars that she is still there, and thereby dissuade them from attempting a robbery. In other words, once Jane recognises what the absence of lamplight at night indicates, she is in a position to use this index as an arbitrary signifier. Jane combines her understanding of her light habits with hypotheses about the burglars’ potential interpretations of these habits and exploits this for her own purpose. Unfortunately for Jane, the burglars may also be capable of making inferences about her inferences about them.

Markel’s (1997) discussion of abstraction provides another potentially fruitful avenue for further investigation. Markel endorses the view that the use of symbols, or arbitrary sign relationships, is a uniquely human capacity. He notes that symbols can be manifest at various levels of abstraction. Thus, at a lower level of abstraction, there is the act of naming and at higher levels of abstraction the thing named can be classified into various categories, as illustrated in Table 2:
Table 2: Markel’s levels of abstraction

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Perception</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>![Cow Image]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abstraction 1: Naming</th>
<th>“Bessie”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abstraction 2: Classifying</td>
<td>“Cow”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abstraction 3: Classifying</td>
<td>“Livestock”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abstraction 4: Classifying</td>
<td>“Farm Assets”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abstraction 5: Classifying</td>
<td>“Wealth”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is worthwhile noting how contextually and culturally dependent the acts of naming and abstraction are. In Indian Hindu culture, for example, a cow would not be a farm animal and would represent a spiritual asset. Further, the intracultural differences may be just as salient as intercultural differences. As Markel notes, even within a more narrowly defined cultural context “it may . . . be quite illuminating to ponder the fact that [a cow] may be wealth to the stockyard owner but “Bessie” to the farmer who raised her” (1997, p. 24). There might also be differences between individual dairy farmers. One farmer might treat all his cows like pets, and give them names. Another farmer might have a more detached relationship with his livestock and refer to his cows by number. Markel argues that we are often not conscious of the fact that “our classifications are simply a reflection of social convenience and necessity, and that different necessities produce different classifications” (1997, p. 24).

Although the relationships between the individual signifiers and signifieds in the system are arbitrary symbols, the classification system itself functions indexically, in that the system of abstraction is conditioned by the social, historical and cultural context in which it arises. As an example of the preconscious influence of culture on thinking, Markel cites research collected in a work called *The Influence of culture on visual perception* and authored by Segal,
Campbell, and Herskovits. These researchers found that individuals in Africa did not fall for the Sander parallelogram and Müller-Lyer illusions depicted in Figures 3 & 4.

**Figure 3 : The Sandler parallelogram illusion**

Urban-dwelling westerners tended to perceive the diagonal line on the left side of the parallelogram as longer than the diagonal line on the right. They also exhibited a tendency to perceive the line on the left of the Müller-Lyer illusion as longer than the arrowed line on the right. In contrast, Africans from less developed regions were more likely to correctly perceive the lines in question as equal in length. One hypothesised reason for this was quite simply that, for urban
dwellers, these lines tacitly represented the three dimensional, highly “carpentered” and angular environments that they live in. The African individuals tested had not been immersed in a rectilinear world and therefore did not automatically and unconsciously infer that the lines and angles shown to them represented three-dimensional space. In short, the urban dwellers’ illusory perceptions are based on a conflation of the actual length of the lines and the distance that they represent. If we were to describe this phenomenon in semiotic terms, we could say that urban dwellers confuse the iconic signifier (the lines on the page) with the signified (what the lines represent in the angular developed urban environment).

While perceptual illusions have been interpreted as physiological rather than psychological phenomena, such an explanation raises the question of why all cultures are not equally susceptible to particular illusions. The research summarised by Markel suggests that this particular illusion may be penetrable by cognitive experience. This conclusion is supported by recent research by Weidner and Fink (2007) who found that “top-down” as well as “bottom-up” processes influenced the way that illusions are perceived: “Perceiving the Müller-Lyer line-length illusion activates neural structures involved in object perception as well as structures involved in performing visuospatial judgements” (p. 883).

In spite of the powerful influence of environmental factors suggested by the cross-cultural differences in susceptibility to the Müller-Lyer and Sandler illusions, Markel resists the view that environmental or social variables are necessarily more important than individual variables in semiotic analysis. For example, his view on the influence of social roles is that “just as there can be no social role behaviour that is not associated with a particular [social] role, there can be no social role unless there is some individual personality to perform this role” (1997, p. 60). Although this might seem a truism, it provides a healthy balance to some of the cultural determinist views in contemporary semiotics and cultural studies.
Markel does state, however, that aspects of speech can be an index of cultural phenomena as well as attitudinal phenomena. He notes that an individual may sometimes feel that his or her attitudes clash with social values. Markel argues that if an individual is aware of the clash, he or she will be able to choose attitudes and values that are suitable for them, rather than those that have been, by implication, foisted upon them. This raises some important questions. For example, what makes a world view truly ours rather than falsely adopted? Markel’s distinction between social roles and individuals who occupy social roles is a useful first step in answering questions such as this. Materialist accounts of the world, which conceptualise people as individuals who are influenced by biological, psychological, and historical forces as well as social and ideological forces, are in a much better position to capture the dialectic between individual and society. Mann (1994), for example, develops a model of the individual-social dialectic in a historical materialist and psychoanalytic framework.

Markel uses his discussions of the Müller-Lyer and Sandler illusions to illustrate his thesis that semiotic psychology has the potential to bring to conscious attention unconscious influences on behaviour and therefore make behaviour more amenable to conscious control:

Just as knowledge of the fact that we live in a carpentered world leads us to measure the lines in optical illusions, if we are conscious that we also live in a racist and sexist world, we can begin to free ourselves from the erroneous notions, illusions and delusions these prejudices have created. (1997, p. 42)

Markel is here mixing perceptual and cognitive phenomena and does not allow for the fact that not all illusions are permeable by cognitive factors. He nevertheless makes a valuable point in identifying consciousness-raising as one of the three key ingredients of semiotic psychology. The identification of attitudes through speech or other behaviour is, for Markel, the first step in becoming aware of phenomena such as the cultural basis of susceptibility to visual illusions, or the differences in cultural values and meanings associated with a cow. “The second step is to verbalise the content of the attitude” (1997, p. 159). For Markel, speech is the royal road to the identification of values and ideology because ideologies
are embodied in “clusters of attitudes or emotions” (1997, p. 160) that can potentially be verbalised. Hence Markel’s conclusion:

The implication of this triadic relationship between speech signs, attitudes/emotions, and values/ideology is that we can become conscious of speech signs that express attitudes/emotions that are not an accurate index of our own values/ideology. Consciousness-raising provides the foundation to choose to send or receive messages that reflect our worldviews—the central purpose of Semiotic Psychology is to provide this choice. (1997, p. 160)

The consciousness-raising and choice-enhancing potential that Markel attributes to semiotic psychology can only be actualised, however, if there are motivational factors at work. A greater level of awareness, or access to a greater amount of knowledge, does not by itself predict how individuals will use that knowledge. For example, while greater awareness could facilitate meta-cognitive management of the self, it does not predict which goals, if any, these self-management skills would be used to achieve. Motivational constructs still need to be invoked for a complete explanation. For example, if Jane becomes aware of racist or sexist attitudes that she holds, she might then strive either to attenuate them, enhance them, take no action, avoid thinking about them, and so on.

Markel’s vision of semiotic psychology, and the ease with which he harnesses empirical research in support of his model, belies some of the more recent discussions around and bifurcations between qualitative and quantitative research and calls for mixed method research. Gallois (1997) notes that “by the mid to late 1970s, the work described in Semiotic Psychology had been forgotten by all but a few researchers” (p. xix).

One of the areas not covered in Markel’s model is the exploration of semiotic media other than linguistic and paralinguistic behaviour. While Markel uses the example of a visual illusion to illustrate the cultural influence on thought, he does not discuss at any length semiotic media apart from speech and paralinguistic features: “The content units counted by semiotic psychologists are speech units, that is, the linguistic and paralinguistic units of the speech channel”
To his credit, however, Markel does not present language and paralanguage as models that have to be used as a template to explore other semiotic systems. In spite of its limitations, Markel’s synthesis of semiotic research in psychology represents a sound approach. This is in contrast to the work of Michon et al., who adopt a conceptually unsound framework with the computer metaphor of mental processes at its centre.

2.2. SEMIOSIS AND THE QUALITATIVE TRADITION

Given that semiosis is a non-quantitative and relational phenomenon, the qualitative-interpretative tradition in psychology and the social sciences would seem the most viable area to explore for resources to build a model of a semiotically informed psychology. There are two aspects of the qualitative-interpretative tradition, however, that impede a sound conceptualisation of semiosis. Firstly, there is a frequent reliance on idealist philosophies. Secondly the qualitative-interpretative tradition is saturated with conceptualisations whereby human action is only considered to the extent that it is governed by factors in the immediate social situation. The marginalisation of the individual and cultural factors that govern action is so pervasive in qualitative social science approaches that Campbell (1996) coined the phrase “social situationism” to describe this tendency.

In contrast to its philosophical principles, many of the methodological principles of the qualitative-interpretative tradition are compatible with the realist foundations established in the present work. Three methodological principles in qualitative scholarship stand out. Firstly, there is the greater degree of openness on the part of the researcher to the subjective experience of research participants. Secondly, according to the principle of reflexivity, qualitative researchers pay greater attention to the role of their own subjectivity in the research process. Finally, the contextual focus of qualitative research refers to its social and historical context, and its applicability to settings outside of the laboratory or immediate research context.
2.2.1. A survey of qualitative-interpretative research

The term *qualitative-interpretative* has been adopted in the present work to cover a broad range of scholarship that is potentially relevant to semiotics. Henwood (1996) notes that labels such as *interpretive*, *contextual*, and *naturalistic* are interchangeable references to the qualitative paradigm. The qualitative paradigm was explored in more detail in a study by Rennie, Watson & Montario (2002). Rennie et al. support their thesis that there has been an increase in *qualitative* research with *quantitative* evidence derived from literature searches of electronic databases. Rennie et al. operationally define qualitative research in terms of the *PsychINFO* database subject categories listed in the table below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Search term</th>
<th>Number of hits</th>
<th>Psychological journals</th>
<th>Other journals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Qualitative research</td>
<td>392</td>
<td>536</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grounded theory</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>244</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discourse analy(sis)</td>
<td>440</td>
<td>296</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empirical phenomenological</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phenomenological psychology</td>
<td>256</td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Rennie’s et al. search methodology was painstaking. They studied each abstract in the search to determine whether it constituted a hit. They also cross-tabulated the data by four time periods (1900-1969, 1970-79, 1980-89 and 1990-99). They found an increase of qualitative research over time—both in absolute terms and relative to the total database.

While the proportion of qualitative research in the fields nominated above doubled in the decade of 1980-89 and quadrupled in 1990-99, it still accounted for only 0.36% of the total database. One reason that the proportion is so low is that
the researchers excluded several terms that they did not regard as exemplary of the qualitative research paradigm. The authors’ list of excluded terms included *content analysis, hermeneutic* and *interpretative*. We could also add *semiotics* and *meaning*. *Structuralism* would capture some qualitative research but is too polysemous to be relied upon without examining the content of the article where the term structure appears. *Post-structuralism* and *post-modernism* on the other hand are more clearly aligned with a qualitative *approach* even though they may not have much to offer in terms of a unified *method*. According to Denzin and Lincoln (2003), semiotics and structuralism began to influence the qualitative research tradition in the period 1970-1986, when qualitative researchers expanded the repertoire of research “genres” upon which they drew. Even though this influence was not always positive, the common focus on issues of meaning, language and interpretation in semiotics and the qualitative research tradition in psychology, suggests a potential for a combined, and perhaps even synergistic, approach.

Therefore, a broader and more accurate perspective on the prevalence of qualitative research can be presented by entering each of Rennie’s et al. search terms, together with the others they did not include, in a “Key word” search in the *PsychINFO* and *MedLine* data bases hosted by Ovid. The resulting tallies are displayed in the following table:
Table 4: Frequency of various qualitative research key words
(Electronic Search *PsychINFO* and *MedLine* databases conducted on 22 November 2005)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key word(s)</th>
<th>Databases</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>MedLine (Ovid)</em></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1966 to November Week 2 2005</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key word(s)</th>
<th>MedLine (Ovid)</th>
<th>PsychINFO (Ovid)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Qualitative research</td>
<td>4283</td>
<td>3463</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Quantitative research</td>
<td>404</td>
<td>730</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Semiotics</td>
<td>201</td>
<td>781</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Syntax, semantics, pragmatics</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>151</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Pragmatics</td>
<td>219</td>
<td>2145</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Semantics</td>
<td>10936</td>
<td>8356</td>
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<tr>
<td>7. Syntax</td>
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<td>5543</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Discourse analysis</td>
<td>241</td>
<td>3069</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Grounded theory</td>
<td>1739</td>
<td>2538</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Empirical phenomenological</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>162</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Phenomenological psychology</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>187</td>
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<td>12. Content analysis</td>
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<td>6412</td>
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<tr>
<td>13. Conversation analysis</td>
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<tr>
<td>14. Ethnography</td>
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<td>2469</td>
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<td>15. Ethnomethodology</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. Repertory grid technique</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>215</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. Interpretive</td>
<td>2215</td>
<td>4199</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. Structuralism</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>571</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. Post-structuralism</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20. Deconstruction</td>
<td>131</td>
<td>534</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21. Post-modernism</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22. Metaphor</td>
<td>1388</td>
<td>5799</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The table above needs to be interpreted cautiously, given that the type of data filtering and checking procedures employed by Rennie et al. were not followed and because there is a significant overlap between the PsychINFO and MedLine data sets.

In spite of these data collection limitations, it is safe to conclude from the frequencies represented in the table that there is a wide range of concepts in both databases that are, on face value, representative of meaning phenomena—beyond the short list given by Rennie et al. (2002). PsychINFO yields (in descending order) semantics, content analysis, metaphor, syntax and interpretive as the most frequently cited terms in this conceptual family. In MedLine the most frequently cited key words are also semantics, with qualitative research a distant runner up. Then, in descending order, there is content analysis, interpretative and grounded theory.

A survey of books and book chapters in the field of qualitative psychology suggests an even broader range of investigation. Bannister, Parker, Taylor & Tindall (1994) list the following as the main divisions of qualitative psychological research: observation, interviewing, personal construct theory, discourse analysis, and action research. This listing represents a British orientation to qualitative research in psychology, which is different in emphasis from the North American orientation of Rennie et al. (2002). A group of British researchers, including Jonathan Potter and Derek Edwards, have been involved in the development of discursive psychology. Edwards (2005) outlines the field of discursive psychology, rather narrowly, as “the application of principles and methods from discourse and conversation analysis . . . to psychological themes” (p. 258).

Cresswell (1998) selected the following as the most important traditions of qualitative research in psychology: biography, phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography and case study. Holloway and Jefferson (2000), in a work titled Doing qualitative research differently, focus on the use of interviewing (specifically narrative interviewing) and free association as a way of overcoming
the limitations of quantitative survey research. Wilkinson (2003) discusses the use of focus groups as a qualitative psychological research strategy. Dallos and Verere (2005) discuss grounded theory, interpretative phenomenological analysis, theme analysis, discourse analysis, rhetorical analysis, narrative analysis, qualitative observation and case study as the key qualitative methods in psychotherapy and counselling research. A method-oriented collection entitled Doing social psychology research (Breakwell, 2004) includes chapters on the qualitative techniques of laddering (from personal construct psychology), focus groups and cognitive mapping. Cognitive mapping is a method of graphically mapping the concepts generated by participants in semi-structured interviews.

One of the limitations of the preceding survey is that it offers few clues as to where to draw the assumed boundary between qualitative and quantitative research. Rennie et al. were guided by tradition and common practice in defining the subdiscipline of qualitative psychology. Others have proposed for inclusion into the qualitative psychology paradigm techniques that can be considered as belonging equally to the quantitative and qualitative tradition, such as observation, interviewing and case study. Moreover, research may exhibit various mixtures of quantitative methods or philosophies. Hence some conceptual clarification is required regarding the principles according to which qualitative research is to be defined. This deficit in conceptual clarification is related to a second limitation of the preceding survey. It relied mainly on frequency counts of categories that were not submitted to any significant degree of qualitative analysis. In order to arrive at a more systematic account of the field of qualitative research it would be helpful to supplement the preceding overview with a conceptual analysis.

2.2.2. An analysis of qualitative research terminology

From a realist point of view, the frequency of nomination of qualitative and interpretative terms in a database is not necessarily a reflection of the prevalence of qualitative research, for a phenomenon can exist and be discovered without
being explicitly nominated. For example, the repertory grid technique is popular in applied psychological settings (e.g. Horley 2003) and as a research method in Britain. However, it is not always nominated explicitly as a qualitative research methodology, even though it is, *prima facie*, qualitative in nature. More generally, qualitative research was being conducted long before that body of research was explicitly nominated as such. It was only after the behaviourist insistence on quantitative methods became established, that qualitative research became a self-conscious movement. Gobo (2005) notes:

Even though qualitative research has been around for more than a century, the first text that tried to define its *methodology* did not appear until the late sixties. *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research* by Glaser and Strauss (1967) is in fact commonly known as the first articulated contribution to qualitative methodology. (¶ 1)

Similarly, Visser (1999) outlines a substantial body of scholarship in The Netherlands that is not explicitly nominated as semiotic, but is semiotic in nature. Visser notes that “many studies of the science of language were not labelled “semiotic” and this meant they remained unnoticed in semiotic circles” (p. 67). One example is the work of A.D. de Groot. Visser (1999) notes that de Groot called his approach *significs*, and this might be one reason that it did not receive greater recognition in spite of the fact that it is similar to the better-known approach of Morris (1946).

De Groot aimed to arrive at a consensual analysis of psychological concepts such as intelligence and intuition by means of a close analysis of language. De Groot also wanted to capture the richness of these concepts in their everyday uses. Consider for example, de Groot’s analysis of the concept of intuition:

1. An *operational unit* within a process of problem solving, or this process as a whole, will be called *intuitive* if there are sound reasons to consider the following conditions as fulfilled:
2. At least one result can be judged reasonably objectively as being “right” or “wrong”, or as being more or less “good” or “strong” as compared to alternative options.

3. At the moment of concluding/deciding the subject is more or less strongly convinced that his result is “right” etc., in the sense of (1).

4. In a later, thorough analysis, the subject’s conviction proves to have been valid—in strong cases surprisingly valid.

5. Even in a thorough interrogation, the subject is unable to justify his result by means of sufficiently reasonable arguments: he himself may call it an “intuitive” anticipation—of what will come, or prove to be true—or a deep “hunch” based on experiences or he may say that he cannot explain it at all.

6. On the basis of his known experience and know-how or expertise in the pertinent domains, and, to the extent available, on the basis of his previous record in intuitive achievement, the subject is assumed to have a certain ability in intuitive operating; that is, to produce results that are strikingly “good” much more often than can be expected by chance (luck).


By means of analyses such as these, de Groot aimed to arrive at the common ground between everyday understandings of a concept and technical psychological understandings. De Groot’s analysis demonstrates the value of a reflexive approach, for this is an inquiry into the phenomenon of intuition and into the manner in which psychologists have conceptualised the phenomenon of intuition. While it is technically detailed, there is nothing in De Groot’s analysis of intuition that would be foreign to a person who was not an expert in psychology. Hence de Groot’s approach has the potential of serving to bridge the gap that is sometimes noted in the qualitative-interpretative tradition, between science and individuals' everyday ‘lived reality’.

While the prevalence of terms such as “semiotics” or “qualitative” is an imperfect reflection of the scope of semiotic scholarship, in the case of quantitative research, lack of nomination appears, at first approach, to be unrelated to the prevalence of the quantitative paradigm. Between 1967 and 2005,
only 440 articles in *PsychINFO* were linked to the keyword search term “quantitative research”. Yet the vast majority of psychological research attempts to quantify psychological variables and employ quantitative analysis methods—primarily psychometric measures and tests of statistical significance.

A possible explanation for this is as follows. In the field of psychology, the association between quantification and science is widely seen as a necessary rather than contingent one. This assumption is seen as so self-evidently true, and the field of psychology is so saturated with quantitative methods, that psychologists forget that it is there. In contrast, qualitative research is not taken for granted and is more likely to be treated with scepticism. Hence it has to declare itself as a subject or a key word rather than lie inconspicuously in the methodological and ideological framework of papers. In typical quantitative research reports, quantification is discussed in the method section as a *vehicle* of the research rather than foregrounded as a *subject* of the research.

In the field of psychology, quantitative research numerically and normatively saturates the research landscape to such an extent that psychological research does not need to be referred to as quantitative research. Rather it is simply referred to as psychological research. It is taken for granted that quantification will be part of the method. In contrast, qualitative research is explicitly nominated because it is assumed to depart from a statistical, and sometimes moral, norm. At least some of the researchers in psychology carry with them an explicit or implicit judgement that quantitative research is better than qualitative research because it is thought to be more evidence-based, scientific or empirical:

The habit of dismissing qualitative work out of hand stands in sharp contrast to the meticulous consideration that psychologists usually give to methodology. Indeed, some call psychology’s enthronement of methods “methodolatory”. Most of us would rap the knuckles of a student who offered flabby arguments such as, “It just doesn’t seem like science”, or “If it doesn’t have numbers, it can’t be psychology” or “I can’t tell if it’s interesting, it doesn’t have any statistics”. Yet these are verbatim
evaluations written by prominent psychologists reviewing qualitative research manuscripts for publication. (Marecek, 2003, p. 50)

Maracek’s observation suggests that in order to gain a fuller understanding of the origins of the differences in nomination of qualitative and quantitative research, there needs to be an analysis of the differences in attitude amongst psychologists to qualitative and quantitative research and the material context in which psychologists work. It could be argued, for example, that psychologists are generally motivated to maintain their professional status and the status of psychology as a science. They are thus more inclined to adopt quantitative methods because quantification is associated with scientific principles—such as the requirement for objective and repeatable observation. However quantification can also be associated with pseudo-scientific principles, such as the quantification of variables without evidence that they are quantitative (Michell, 2004). In short, terminology used to describe the quantitative tradition, as it is nominated in research databases, may be a function of the cultural legacy of psychology rather than an outcome of empirical research or thorough conceptual investigation.

Fortunately, Potter (1996) has undertaken an extensive survey and conceptual analysis of quantitative research which can shed light on some of these issues. Potter separates social, philosophical, and methodological aspects of quantitative research. His framework yields six key aspects of qualitative research and provides a foundation for a realist analysis of the quantitative-qualitative distinction.

2.2.3. Six aspects of qualitative research

One way to clarify the nature of qualitative research is to compare it with quantitative research. A close analysis of this opposition will reveal that:

1. Many of the characteristics which are said to be unique to either the qualitative or quantitative traditions are in fact common to both,
2. Some characteristics that are particular to qualitative research could be profitably adopted by quantitative research, and
3. Some characteristics that are particular to qualitative research should not be adopted by either approach because they are logically flawed.

There are six elements that account for the variation in qualitative research (cf. Potter, 1996). These may serve to focus the discussion:

1. Research or disciplinary traditions,
2. Broad philosophical positions on questions of epistemology and ontology,
3. Specific philosophical axioms about qualitative research,
4. Broad methodologies following from these axioms,
5. Specific methods suggested by these methodologies, and
6. The nature of the phenomena under investigation.

The six elements can be ordered on a continuum from abstract to concrete, with the first two aspects being the most abstract and dimension six being the most concrete. The first aspect has already been discussed in relation to the study conducted by Rennie et al. (2002). Their discussion suggests that the distinction between qualitative and quantitative research is based on the contingent or historical practices in the discipline of psychology. The authors used pragmatic criteria to define the qualitative tradition. For example, if a research method was prominent in psychological journals dedicated to qualitative research, this was regarded as one of the indicators that the method belongs to the tradition of qualitative psychological research.

The position adopted in the present work is that the last element is the only valid criterion for defining qualitative research. Element six captures the realist argument that the difference between qualitative and quantitative research must be founded on the qualitative or quantitative nature of the phenomena studied (Michell, 2004). It is worthwhile, however, examining each of these elements in more detail, beginning with element six as the benchmark.
The nature of the phenomena under investigation

Lund (2005) comes close to a realist position on the qualitative-quantitative issue. Like Potter (1996), he notes that there have been several features according to which qualitative and quantitative research have been distinguished and therefore “the debate has been a many-sided one, ranging from particular themes about methods for collecting and analysing data to ontological and epistemological issues” (p. 115). Lund argues that since there are no valid grounds for the bifurcation of qualitative and quantitative methods, this bifurcation could be replaced with a typology of scientific reasoning that encapsulates the range of inferences made in all kinds of research. According to Lund (2005), the types of inferences made in qualitative and quantitative research overlap and can be captured by Campbell and Cook’s typology, which is displayed in Table 5.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of inference</th>
<th>Type of validity</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Statistical</td>
<td>Statistical conclusion validity: Is the result non-random and interesting in terms of the size of the statistical effect?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Causal</td>
<td>Internal validity: Does a causal relationship exist between the research variables as they are operationalised?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Construct</td>
<td>Construct validity: Does an indicator measure a particular construct?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Generalisation</td>
<td>External validity: Can the result be generalised to different contexts?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Lund argues that it is not the type of data that matters but the validity system within which the data are interpreted: “The validity system is independent of the nature of the empirical methods and data used for securing validity” (p. 122). Lund states that qualitative research is more likely to be focused on construct inferences and generalisations. Qualitative research is concerned with causal inferences to a lesser extent and “statistical inferences apparently are irrelevant”
Lund questions the need for the quantitative-qualitative bifurcation, given the shared inferential framework of these methods: “Why not drop these terms, and consider the corresponding methods as variants of empirical research in psychology, education, and related fields?” (p. 130).

Lund’s emphasis on the validity system rather than data typology is partially consistent with Michell’s (2004) realist critique of measurement-driven research in psychology. For Michell however, the type of data used in research does matter in one respect. He makes the point that researchers need to avoid treating qualitative phenomena as if they were quantitative. It follows that quantitative data are not valid if they are collected on the basis of a false assumption that the phenomenon “measured” is quantitative. Michell makes the point that although only quantitative phenomena are measurable, the measurement procedures used to analyse the data in quantitative psychology are often used to obscure, rather than test, the assumption of measurability: “The analytical methods used to construct tests and interpret their scores, such as factor analysis and item response models, are used to supplement this conjecture, not as tools for critically scrutinizing it” (2004, p. 309). Michell argues that psychologists have sometimes forced phenomena into the quantitative measurement mould and ignored qualitative phenomena that could not be readily coopted into this mould.

Michell (2004) adds that the selection of qualitative and quantitative research methods should be flexibly guided by the nature of the phenomena studied, rather than by investigators’ beliefs with respect to, sometimes anti-scientific, epistemological and ontological matters:

It is counterproductive to the cause of advancing qualitative methods to allow the subtleties of metaphysical disagreements to get in the way of methodological liberalisation. Instead, what must be stressed is that the traditional, realist conception of scientific method entails methodological flexibility. (2004, p. 317)

Michell (2004) lists meaning as an example of a phenomenon which is qualitative and should be studied in a qualitative way, rather than measured. Barrett (2003)
also reminds us that there are phenomena (including semiotic phenomena) that are not quantitative even though they may be studied using mathematics:

If mathematics is considered as the science of abstract structure, then it is obvious that not all structures studied using mathematics are quantitative. For example, the structure of communication and social networks, graphs, language grammars, therapeutic interactions, automata networks, etc., are essentially non-quantitative. (p. 430)

The recognition of the scientifically accessible and qualitative nature of semiosis is a prerequisite for the interdisciplinary approach required for its investigation. Rather than focusing on this key issue, the qualitative-quantitative debate has been hijacked by an ideological debate. The potentially simple distinction between qualitative and quantitative phenomena has been used to create a false opposition between “hard” empiricist science using numbers and “alternative” non-numerical, or even allegedly anti-scientific, approaches.

While a consideration of the qualitative or quantitative nature of the phenomenon to be investigated would seem an important starting point for choosing an approach to study qualitative phenomena such as semiosis, other less rigorous criteria have also been used to define the contrast between qualitative and quantitative research.

**Broad philosophical positions on questions of epistemology and ontology**

Several scholars have yoked the qualitative research tradition to subjectivist philosophical positions. Some of the problems previously discussed with respect to idealist philosophies also apply to subjectivism. If the epistemological and ontological dead wood is cut off the subjectivist tree of knowledge, however, the result is a potentially workable approach.

Marecek (2003) states that “the heart of qualitative inquiry is its epistemological stance: its commitment to interrogating subjectivity, intentional action, and experiences embedded in real-life contexts” (p. 55). In spite of the
word *epistemological* preceding Marecek’s listing of the key ingredients of qualitative inquiry, commitment to the study of contextualised subjective experience and action are simply criteria that serve to define the boundaries of the field. These criteria are compatible with any epistemology. In particular, the study of *subjectivity* does not necessarily mean a commitment to a *subjectivist* *epistemology*. One way to define subjectivity is in terms of three fundamental aspects of an individual’s mental processes. These consist of:

1. Beliefs about the world, irrespective of whether these beliefs are right or wrong,
2. Preferences, in the sense of likes and dislikes, and
3. Moral attitudes or beliefs about what is right and wrong.


Such a characterisation of subjectivity is consistent with a realist objective framework.

Marecek is not the only researcher to characterise the qualitative movement in philosophical terms. Potter (1996) notes that there is a broad trend to frame the qualitative-quantitative distinction in this way, and summarises the philosophical positions that qualitative and quantitative researchers can take. These are summarised in Table 6.
While qualitative researchers usually take positions on the left wing of the philosophical spectrum represented in the table above, quantitative researchers are more likely to take positions on the right wing.

As is illustrated in the top half of the table, in Potter’s schema, positions on the question of ontology range from solipsism, (the thoroughly idealist position that nothing exists independently of the mind) to the completely materialist position of mechanistic materialism. According to Potter, qualitative research grew out of “the idealist argument that humans creatively and subjectively construct meaning for themselves, and this phenomenon cannot be captured using a scientific approach” (1996 p. 49). As was demonstrated in the discussion of realism in the present work, there are serious problems with an idealist approach. These will be further illustrated in the expanded discussion at the end of this chapter on phenomenology in qualitative research.

Potter described the middle position on the ontological continuum, actionalism, as exemplified by Aristotle and Kant, and shared by a significant proportion of mass media researchers, who believe that human beings possess goals which are partly chosen and partly determined by social influences. Unfortunately the account of human subjects or actors and their goals presented in

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The ontological continuum</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Idealism</strong>&lt;-----------------------------<strong>Materialism</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Solipsism</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The epistemological continuum</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Constructionism</strong>&lt;-------------------<strong>Realism</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pure subjectivity</td>
</tr>
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media studies is generally very limited. It is true that media studies have advanced greatly from the simplistic causal or “hypodermic needle” models, which regarded media as the cause and consumers’ beliefs and attitudes as effects unmediated by any kind of interpretative context. However, even a sophisticated benchmark analysis of media consumption by Morley (1980) categorised the audience as participating in dominant (accepting the hypodermic needle), oppositional (resisting the needle) or negotiated (somewhere in between) responses to a popular television show. It could be argued that actionalism is an advance over idealist positions in that it at least acknowledges the reality of the individual and the causal interaction between individual and society. Actionalism nevertheless carries anti-scientific overtones of people choosing, *ex nihilo*, their course of action.

Potter gives the example of the work of B.F. Skinner as an example of mechanistic materialism. While the realist position adopted in the present work is compatible with mechanistic materialism and would sit on the same point of the ontological continuum as B.F. Skinner, it is not completely compatible with Skinner’s position because Skinner’s materialism is of a reductionist kind. Realism is not compatible with reductionist materialism or any kind of philosophical reductionism—whether it is reduction of beliefs to behaviour or reduction of mental relations to brain states, as proposed by mind–brain identity theorists. Both of these reductions deny the relational nature of action and thought.

As is illustrated in the bottom half of the table, positions on the question of epistemology range from pure subjectivity to pure objectivity. Subjectivist and constructionist researchers “make no attempt to argue (or in any way make a case) that their interpretation is anything but their own personal interpretation” (Potter, 1996, p. 42). Berger and Luckman (1966), for example propose that if the real world exists, it is not in principle directly knowable.
According to Potter (1996) an objectivist would regard researcher bias as an “operational (not epistemological) problem that can be solved” (p. 42). This is in accordance with the realist position and analysis embraced in this work. It should be added, however, that given the diffusion of subjectivity—in the world of the researcher and the researched—it would be better to say that the “problem” of subjectivity can be solved in principle. Better still, rather than regarding subjectivity as a problem, it is more productive to regard it as a factor to be accounted for in theory and research. If the researcher is aware of subjective factors, then he or she is in a better position to implement strategies to experimentally or conceptually take into account the effect of subjective variables in the planning and analysis of their research (Bannister, et al, 1994).

The principle of taking into account the subjectivity of the researcher is equally applicable to quantitative research. One example of this is Shapiro et al. (1994), who took the view that research into psychotherapy effectiveness, including trials comparing cognitive-behavioural therapies with other therapies, was not immune to social psychological influences such as the therapist’s allegiance to a particular school of psychotherapy. Shapiro and colleagues thus decided to control for this factor experimentally in their research on therapy for depression by selecting researchers who expressed an equivalent allegiance to cognitive-behavioural therapy and interpersonal therapy.

Researchers in psychotherapy effectiveness studies take care to randomise subjects across treatment groups. They do this in order to ensure that the results of the experiment are due to the treatments delivered rather than subject characteristics, or other extraneous factors. In contrast, there is seldom any attempt to randomise the therapists delivering the treatment across treatment groups. In other words, there is seldom an attempt to “even out” the effects of therapist allegiance on the treatment. Consider a hypothetical study where all therapists delivering a cognitive treatment for anxiety believed that it was going to be effective and all of the therapists delivering the comparison therapy believed it was going to be ineffective. It is at least conceivable that these allegiances would influence the results to the extent that any finding of differential effectiveness in
therapies would be confounded by the subjective factor of therapist allegiance. The plausibility of this hypothetical scenario is supported by Rosnow and Rosenthal’s (1997) analysis of bias in psychological research.

Potter argued that intersubjectivity represents a middle position, between subjectivist and objectivist positions:

Researchers can never purely be objective, but they are not limited to pure subjectivity either. It is possible for researchers to perceive the same thing, to arrive at the same meaning, but it is also possible for several researchers to have different interpretations. (1996, p. 42)

This rather featureless statement might be compatible with an objectivist position as long as the tendency for researchers to arrive at different interpretations is not elevated to epistemological principles regarding the elusiveness of truth and reality. Realist theory is not only compatible with the investigation of phenomena such as divergences in researchers’ interpretations, researchers’ biases, and the effects of researchers’ theoretical allegiance, it is essential for such investigations. It is only if there is the possibility of unbiased accounts—accounts of real states of affairs—that we can speak of phenomena such as researchers’ interpretations or biased findings. Maze’s (2001) critique of the social constructionist position of Gergen and the philosophy of Jacques Derrida that informs Gergen’s position is relevant here. Maze points out that, from a realist point of view, there is no choice in the matter of whether to take an objectivist or subjectivist-constructionist position. To even claim to be taking a subjectivist position, one is putting forward the claim as if it were an objective truth. Moreover, Maze argues that there must be an assumption of objectivity before any claim can be made.

Maze also notes, however, that the constructionist approach has yielded valuable analyses in spite of its shaky subjectivist philosophical foundations:

There are many social constructs that impose a misleading gloss on social processes, and are constructed to serve the interests of particular social groups. Members of the constructionist school have demonstrated this by collating cross-cultural data on stereotypes of many kinds…. These are the
benefits offered by social constructionism … similar kinds of social criticism have been an honourable part of social psychology since it emerged. (2001, p. 415)

In summary, it can be acknowledged that it is a useful contribution for some scholars in the qualitative research tradition to bring attention to the theme of subjectivity as is manifested in the researcher, the research participant, and society in general. There is no justification, however, for turning this focus into a philosophical position.

**Specific philosophical axioms about qualitative research**

According to Potter (1996) a researcher’s core theoretical axioms represent a less abstract element of qualitative research compared to philosophical positions. These axioms are nevertheless the consequences of a researcher’s philosophical position. Potter argues that axioms in turn inform the methodology or broad research strategy adopted. The choice of methodology is said to then determine the specific research methods or specific tactics that the qualitative researcher adopts. Potter gives the following example of how the superordinate elements of axiology and methodology influence choices in method:

A scholar who holds strong beliefs (axiom group) about phenomenology and naturalism would be likely to choose an ethnographic methodology and a participation observation method for the purpose of interpreting a culture…. A decision among axioms narrows (but does not direct) the choice of methodology, and the choice of methodology narrows (but does not direct) the choice of method. (1996, p. 24)

For Potter, the axioms of qualitative research represent different views about what constitutes the key assumption underpinning qualitative research. There are five main theses about the core assumption of qualitative research:

1. **Phenomenology**: Researchers should not have preconceived notions about the phenomenon, but keep themselves open to experience fully.

2. **Interpretivism**: Researchers should strive to see the situation from the perspective of the other.
3. Hermeneutics: Research is a never-ending process of observing an instance and interpreting it in terms of a context that is itself a construction of instances.

4. Naturalism: Researchers need to investigate phenomena in their natural undisturbed state.

5. Humanistic studies: Researchers should use a language-centred approach where language is interpreted in cultural and historical contexts.

(cf. Potter, 1996, p. 48)

These axioms could inform qualitative or quantitative research. For example, taking care to adopt an open-minded approach to the subject matter of research (which Potter identifies as the core of phenomenology) could enhance any research. Even researchers who argue that data collection should be informed by theory would need to be open to the reciprocal process of research data informing theory. Contrary to the subjectivist framework from which it emerged, the phenomenological exhortation to openness to experience could be taken to imply an objectivist strategy of being aware of one’s subjective or preconceived notions and putting them aside in favour of knowing the world as it is.

The second axiom, emphasising the validity of the perspective of the other (which, in the context of research, generally means the perspective of the research participants) is closely related to the phenomenology axiom. Even if the perspective of the other is later analysed in terms of the researcher’s perspective, the researcher’s perspective is enriched by paying close attention to the perspective of the research participant in the first instance. For example, some of the widely held principles of research interviewing are that researchers should use, as far as possible, language that is neutral in respect to their theoretical position and which is free from leakages of the researcher’s presuppositions. Thus, leading questions, or questions which presuppose a particular answer, need to be avoided. In using survey methods, researchers are aware of the danger of poorly structured questions in contaminating data from respondents. For example, the following four are common errors in survey questions:
1. **Leading questions.** Eg., “At what level of excellence would you rate the Clinic?”

2. **Double-barrelled questions.** Eg., “What are the good things and not so good things about the services provided at the clinic?”

3. **Questions with a value bias.** Eg.: “Do you have any whinges about the service?”

4. **Complex language:** “Was your serology test explained adequately?”

   (cf. Foddy, 1993)

The use of sound methods in constructing questionnaires helps in the phenomenological mission of facilitating the verbal manifestation of the individual’s beliefs and values. An attitude of openness on the part of researchers will help elicit the least “contaminated” responses. Just as important is an attitude of openness on the part of the researcher to the social and cultural background of the participant.

Research approaches could be placed on a continuum according to the degree to which they are calibrated to investigate the research participant’s point of view versus the degree they are designed to investigate the researcher’s point of view. Thus psychophysiological measures such as galvanic skin response as an indicator of sweating and sympathetic nervous system arousal may not be meaningful for the research participant or even register in his or her awareness. These measures may nevertheless provide answers to a researcher’s questions. Structured questionnaires may both enable and constrain subjective expression while less structured tasks may give the participant’s subjectivity free reign. Even if data are collected with the aim of leaving the subjective responses of the participant in a pristine state, this data must still be subject to some kind of scientific framework. As Giddens (1996) argues, to exclude the investigator’s point of view and rely exclusively on the subjective view of the participant represents a paralysis of the critical will on the part of the researcher.
The third axiom of qualitative research, hermeneutics, consists of an emphasis on particularisation rather than generalisation when making interpretations. The emphasis on the particular, also known as the ideographic approach, is sometimes contrasted to an emphasis on general laws, known as the nomothetic approach (Mos, 1998). Windelband (1894/1998), who coined these terms, was of the view that they were part of a continuum, rather than standing in opposition. He regarded philosophy as the clearest example of a nomothetic science. For Windelband, the dialogue between the science of logic and empirical sciences was essential to the advancement of knowledge:

This vital connection between philosophy and the other disciplines is shown most clearly in the development of logic itself, which was never anything but the critical reflection of the forms of true knowledge presented to it. Never has a fruitful method grown out of abstract construction or the purely formal consideration of logic: to the latter is given only the task of expressing in its general form that which has been successfully carried out in particular. (1894/1998, p. 9)

Hence Windelband argues that the frameworks for the study of logic nurtured by the ancient Greek philosophers bore the juiciest fruit in the form of the empirical investigations of Kepler and Galileo rather than in Bacon’s formalistic logical constructions.

The fourth principle of qualitative research, naturalism, involves a commitment to studying phenomena in their natural state as far as possible, rather than in the laboratory. Bannister et al. outline a worst case scenario where psychological research drifts too far from the phenomena it is designed to investigate. In this scenario, the process of “reduction and abstraction” driven by quantification eventually reaches a point where the natural context “completely disappears” (p. 1). As context disappears, problems around issues of ecological validity, research ethics, demand characteristics, and sampling bias emerge. Methodological intrusions of the experimenters’ and participants’ subjectivity and interpretation return to plague the researcher despite stringent attempts at excluding these factors by means of the operationalist methodology.
Fortunately, the theme of contextualisation has been explored by quantitative researchers—under the banner of ecological validity. For example, multivariate correlational investigations are designed to better capture the complexity of natural settings than experimental research. In multivariate investigations, the impact of multiple variables is statistically isolated. In this respect, quantification can be an aid to naturalism. Less naturalistic research in the quantitative-empirical tradition relies on the experimental isolation of variables or the use of the laboratory setting to ensure controlled and repeatable conditions (Tabachnik & Fidell, 2001).

Another example of the impact of the concepts of naturalism and ecological validity comes from the field of psychotherapy research. In this field, there is a growing appreciation of the complementary contribution of psychotherapy effectiveness studies and efficacy studies. Psychotherapy effectiveness studies are investigations adopting as many features of the randomised controlled trial as possible. Efficacy studies are less controlled but more ecologically valid because they are designed to reflect the way in which therapists actually interact with clients. For example, therapists see people in community settings and do not generally screen out people with comorbid conditions, as is often the case in effectiveness studies (Seligman, 1998).

Potter’s humanism axiom foregrounds material covered by the other axioms discussed. Once again the concepts of meaning, interpretation and context are central and a goal of the humanistic approach is “to illuminate individual experience, not to generalise” (p. 315). While the idiographic approach suggested by humanism is not typically practised in quantitative research, single case clinical studies are being increasingly identified as a small but significant portion of research in the quantitative paradigm (Kohlbacher, 2005). Single case studies are especially useful for the investigation of disorders with a low prevalence in the population, for putting to trial new psychotherapies and for investigating individuals more closely using a case formulation approach. The interpretative principles advocated by the humanist approach could profitably be combined with
the single case approach associated with the quantitative tradition. Maguire’s (2002) cognitive-behavioural case study of Mary, a patient who suffered from paranoia, illustrates interplay of idiographic qualitative and quantitative research, for the central intervention in the successful treatment of Mary was encouraging her to explore alternative interpretations of events which made her anxious and fed her unfounded belief that she was being followed. For example, seeing a man across the street looking at her was originally interpreted as, “They’re doing it deliberately to ruffle me”. With therapy, her interpretation changed to, “It’s a coincidence” (Maguire, 2002, p. 135).

Broad methodologies and specific methods

Potter (1996) argued that there were several broad methodologies that followed from the philosophical axioms of qualitative research. These broad methodologies are in turn related to specific methods. Potter (1996) defines methodologies as “perspectives on research that deal with issues at the juncture of axioms and method” (p. 23). In other words, methodologies are “in the middle between highly abstract axioms and the fairly concrete methods” (p. 23). Potter (1996) proposes that there are six methodologies in qualitative research:

A. Ethnography
B. Ethnomethodology
C. Audience reception studies
D. Ecological psychology
E. Textual analysis
F. Cultural studies

While the methodologies listed above are general strategic approaches to research, methods are the specific tactics of research. Examples of qualitative research methods are interviewing, participant observation, focus groups, and discourse analysis. In contrast, the main methods in quantitative psychological research are controlled experimental and correlational studies.

While the use of numerical data collection and data analysis methods in quantitative research is sometimes regarded as its key distinguishing feature, even
Finding that a few, some, or many participants showed a certain pattern, or that a pattern was *common, thematic, or unusual* in a group of participants, implies something about the frequency, typicality, or even intensity of an event … at the very least these data may be subject to scoring as nominal data. (p. 231)

Similarly, Hammersley (1996) notes that “qualitative researchers regularly make quantitative claims in verbal form, using formulations like ‘regularly’, ‘frequently’, ‘sometimes’, ‘generally’, ‘typically’” (p. 161), and so on. Sandelowski suggests that rather than relying on “verbal counting”, qualitative researchers should make explicit their use of numbers where appropriate.

This discussion about the appropriateness of the use of numbers in both quantitative and qualitative research paradigms is a specific example of the general principle that methodologies or methods are transferable between paradigms. As previously discussed, the only element on which the distinction between qualitative and quantitative research can be legitimately founded is the nature of the phenomenon investigated—whether it possesses quantitative attributes or not. Provided there is no confusion between qualitative and quantitative features of reality, qualitative and quantitative methodology can be integrated. The more abstract philosophical principles of the qualitative-interpretative tradition, particularly subjectivist epistemological principles, have to be rejected, as they are incompatible with a sound realist approach.

**2.2.4. Phenomenology versus realism**

A closer investigation of phenomenology can be used to evaluate in more detail “the idealist argument that humans creatively and subjectively construct meaning for themselves, and [that] this phenomenon cannot be captured using a
scientific approach” (Potter 1996 p. 49). While phenomenology is problematic as a philosophy, it is less problematic as a methodology or general research orientation. A realist analysis of the flaws in phenomenological philosophy also illuminates its methodological strengths. In particular, the methodological principles of openness to human experience, and commitment to close description of that experience, are valuable contributions which are compatible with the realist framework of the present work. In other words, we should not throw out phenomenology’s methodological babies with its dirty philosophical bathwater.

Phenomenology can be regarded as a philosophical school in its own right (Husserl, 1917/1981). Hammersley neatly summarises the essence of the philosophical school of phenomenology as “the descriptive study of how things appear in consciousness” (2004, p. 815). Phenomenology can also be regarded as a philosophical axiom informing many of the qualitative research traditions (Potter, 1996) or a specific method of qualitative research in psychology (Rennie et al., 2004).

**Phenomenology as philosophy**

Jürgen Habermas (1992) lists the four great schools of philosophy in the modern era (allegedly culminating at the end of the twentieth century), as phenomenology, analytic philosophy, Western Marxism and structuralism (Saussurian and Piagetian). Hammersley (2004) notes the origins of phenomenology in the work of Husserl (1859-1938) and the philosophical writings of Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, Sartre and, more recently, Schutz.

Husserl advocated a “science of consciousness” (1917/1981, §16) that was to be developed independently of a science of natural objects. Because psychology is a natural science, “pure phenomenology is to be separated sharply from psychology at large, and specifically from the descriptive psychology of the phenomena of consciousness” (§ 25). Husserl compared the relationship between pure phenomenology and natural studies of consciousness with the relationship between pure and applied disciplines generally. He believed that pure
phenomenology would find its place in the scheme of sciences, just as pure mathematics had found its place. Husserl argued that one could appreciate the nature of pure phenomenology by reflecting on those moments when one suspends belief or judgement. This suspension would enable one to discover the laws of pure consciousness.

Habermas (1992, p. 6) cites the works of Sartre and Merleau-Ponty as the “final productive impetus” of the phenomenological school before it was superseded with a language-centred paradigm of investigation in philosophy. Habermas describes this linguistic turn as a “paradigm shift from the philosophy of consciousness to the philosophy of language” (1992, p. 7). Despite Habermas’ pronouncement of the death of philosophical phenomenology, it continued to inform the methodology of various qualitative-interpretative approaches (Hammersley, 2004).

The idealist, and perhaps solipsistic, nature of phenomenology is evident in the following pronouncement from Husserl. Here he suggests that phenomenological data are created by the mind of the observer rather than discovered:

> It would be the task of phenomenology . . . to investigate how something perceived, something remembered, something phantasised, something pictorially represented, something symbolized, looks as such, i.e., to investigate how it looks by virtue of that bestowal of sense and of characteristics which are carried out intrinsically by the perceiving, the remembering, the phantasysing, the pictorial representing, etc., itself. (1917/1981, § 15)

The notion that an object of perception has a nature bestowed upon it by an act of perception is problematic, as it is built on a conflation of the perceiver and the perceived rather than on an acknowledgment of their independent existence. Since the objects of perception are subsumed in the act of perceiving, phenomenology is a step towards solipsism.
There are nevertheless other aspects of phenomenology that are not entwined with an unworkable philosophy and that could be adopted as part of a realist scientific approach to questions of meaning. In order to understand more fully the difficulty of integrating a phenomenological approach with a scientific approach, it is necessary to explore the core philosophical concept in phenomenology, that of phenomenalism. Phenomenalism is an idealist view that knowledge consists of sensations or phenomena that cannot provide direct evidence of the existence of real states of affairs.

**Phenomenalism and Science**

It could be argued that the following statement illustrates a certain tension between appearances and scientific explanations:

The sun appears to rise and set, yet we know that the earth actually revolves around its axis.

The concessive conjunct *yet* signals that the two statements do not sit easily together. The words *appears* and *actually* expresses a reservation about the credibility of the view that the sun rises and sets. Such an opposition is sometimes used as evidence of an epistemological gulf between appearance and reality, or between subjective truth and objective truth (Coulter, 1979). In fields aligned with science, such as quantitative-experimental psychology, primacy is apparently accorded to objective truth. It could be argued, however, that extreme empiricism, because it is so preoccupied with the data presented to the senses, and the correlations between them, is also a type of phenomenalism (Hibberd, 2005).

While there is a contrast between phenomenal descriptions and scientific accounts, this does not licence the creation of two epistemological realms, namely the scientific and the phenomenological. It is a legitimate task for science to attempt to explain why things appear to people in the ways that they do. It is just as legitimate to investigate scientifically false perceptions and beliefs, as it is to
investigate veridical perceptions and beliefs. For example, it is true that it appears to earth-bound humans that the sun rises on the eastern horizon and sets on the western horizon. It is also true that the earth revolves around its axis when additional facts are considered, such as the position of the earth in relation to the solar system. Similarly, the earth appears flat, and it is more or less flat, when considered from a local terrestrial perspective, and round when additional facts are obtained, perhaps as a result of travelling long distances by sea or by observing the earth from a celestial perspective.

The following is another contrast between appearances and scientific explanations:

Jamal senses his action to be freely chosen, yet from a scientific point of view, his actions are caused or determined.

Even if Jamal understands the principle of scientific determinism, that nothing can happen in a causal vacuum, he will still perceive many of his actions as freely chosen. The realist framework proposed in the present work can readily accommodate the fact that Jamal perceives his actions as freely chosen. It is also a fact that his actions are a product of biological, psychological, historical, and other factors. Rather than creating two epistemological realms, that of subjective experience and objective reality, the realist scientist would look for additional facts to explain the discrepancy between appearances and reality.

Phenomenologists avoid pronouncing judgements on the truth value of folk psychological beliefs. If we adhere strictly to the philosophy of phenomenology, we remain stuck in the phenomenal world of the individuals we are trying to understand. This is inimical to a scientific approach. However, if we adopt phenomenological methodology, and discard its problematic philosophical assumptions, we temporarily suspend judgment on subjective or phenomenal accounts of experience, and then investigate that experience in scientific terms. In the case of free will, some relevant scientific questions are: What is it that we
experience and *label* or *construe/misconstrue* as free will? And what makes us misconstrue it? The following discussion from Wegner’s (2002) is on the correct path to answering these questions:

Rather than opposites, conscious will and psychological determinism can be friends. Such friendship comes from realising that the feeling of conscious will is created by the mind and brain just as human actions themselves are created by the mind and brain. The answer to the question of conscious will, then, may involve exploring how the mechanisms of the human mind create the experience of will (p. ix).

Wegner further argues that the experience of free will plays a causal role in helping us to remember and attribute authorship to actions. Wegner’s analysis goes beyond the consignment of the study of lived human experience, to qualitative psychology and causal analysis of human behaviour, to quantitative psychology. An adequate account of the workings of mind requires the integration of phenomenological description *and* scientific explanation. A first step in this integration is to jettison the philosophical assumptions of phenomenology and preserve its methodological recommendations.

**Phenomenology as methodology**

According to Potter (1996), the phenomenological perspective in qualitative research is at least compatible with the empirical science perspective:

Phenomenology is the belief that the phenomenon should be examined without any preconceived notions or *a priori* expectations. Researchers attempt to get inside the mind of the actor to attempt an understanding of what the actor sees or believe. . . . This is not an axiom of science, although . . . science allows for research without an *a priori* expectation. (1996, p. 315)

In other words phenomenology, as a methodology, can serve as a useful reminder of the danger of incorporating or assimilating people’s experiences into a scientific explanatory framework before that experience is comprehensively described. As Hammersley puts it:
What is rejected [in phenomenology] is any immediate move to evaluate that experience (e.g., as true or false in comparison with scientific knowledge) or even causally explain why people experience the world as they do... both these tendencies risk failing to grasp the complexity and inner logic of people’s understandings of themselves and their world. (2004, p. 815)

This valuable contribution comes from the methodological element of phenomenology. As a philosophy, the solipsistic leaning of phenomenology does more than merely resist any “immediate move” to recast an understanding of human experience along scientific lines; it conceptually precludes any such move. That is why some phenomenologically inspired researchers have taken the position that, ultimately, they are not reporting on anything more than their perceptions (Potter, 1996).

Laughlin (1999) argues that through the use of introspection, one’s cultural and disciplinary biases can be discovered before they express themselves as unintentional “symptoms” in research work. One qualification needs to be made regarding Laughlin’s observation. Introspection alone may not be sufficient for identifying biases, because the reflexive mental process of monitoring for bias may itself be subject to the biasing influences of one’s culture, or other sources. Nevertheless, there is nothing to prevent us from combining introspection with another method, such as systematic observation by means of experimental method to protect against this risk. Sigmund Freud, for example, combined introspection, in the form of self-analysis, (including dream analysis) with clinical observation of individuals. Many of Freud’s propositions were subsequently confirmed or rejected by means of controlled experiments (Fisher and Greenberg, 1996, Erdelyi 1985).

The present analysis of phenomenology demonstrates that the problematic philosophical propositions in the qualitative-interpretative tradition can be decoupled from its sounder methodological propositions. It is possible to selectively adopt aspects of its methodology for the purpose of developing a realist model for the analysis of semiotic phenomena. It is important to
acknowledge that the phenomenology movement has made valuable contributions in the form of its commitment to the comprehensive analysis of subjective experience.

2.2.5. Campbell’s critique of social situationism

Another major limitation of the qualitative-interpretative tradition is its failure to adequately conceptualise the concept of action. Since action is a key concept in a realist approach to semiosis, this deficiency needs to be analysed closely.

Campbell (1996) identifies the focus on the social situation and exclusion of the point of view of the actor as a common theme in contemporary micro-sociological and social psychological approaches. Campbell argues that reference to the point of view of the individual actor (in the sense originally advocated by Max Weber) is essential to the explanation of any action, including meaning-making and communication. Campbell’s analysis of action theories demonstrates that references to the social context or social situation are deficient as explanatory constructs, unless they are supplemented by reference to conative aspects of individual agency. According to Campbell (1996), most contemporary theories of action in social psychology and micro-sociology fall into four groups:

1) Rational actor and rational choice theories “treat as real (or ideal-typical) intra-personal mental processes” (p. 156) in order to predict how individuals will act. An example of this approach is game theories imported from economics and political science.

2) “Social situationist” school theories (including Schutz’s phenomenological theory, symbolic interactionism and ethnomethodology) rely heavily on constructs such as social rules, norms and other aspects of social situations in accounting for why people act the way they do.
3) Broad social theories of Habermas and Giddens take a position somewhere in between the individualist traditional conative action theory proposed by Weber and modern situationist theories.

4) Weber’s approach, which advocates an explanation of action that incorporates the point of view of the individual actor, especially in its conative aspects.

In Campbell’s view, most sociologists belong to the first and second schools; “methodologically individualistic rationalism” (p. 155) and “social situationism”. Campbell adds that “to some extent, this division is equatable with the contrast between quantifiable and qualitative methods” (p. 186). However, Campbell’s analysis demonstrates that there are more salient distinctions than the qualitative-quantitative distinction when it comes to understanding theories of action. The most salient distinction, from Campbell’s point of view, is the distinction between the overwhelming majority of sociological theories that present an over-intellectualising position on human action and Campbell’s position, which represents a return to Max Weber’s classical position. Weber’s position incorporates the conative dimension of action and a focus on the point of view of the individual actor. Campbell’s mapping of action theories is summarised in the following table:
### Table 7: Campbell’s typology of microsociological schools

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Concept of action</th>
<th>Approach</th>
<th>School</th>
<th>Central interests</th>
<th>Method</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intellectualising</td>
<td>Rational actor and rational choice</td>
<td>Game theory</td>
<td>Calculations and judgements informing decisions regarding alternative courses of action</td>
<td>Quantitative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social situationism</td>
<td>Phenomenological sociology (Shutz)</td>
<td>Reflection and interpretation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ethnomethodology (Garfinkel)</td>
<td>Common understandings &amp; sense making.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Symbolic interactionism (C. Wright Mills, H. Blumer)</td>
<td>Naming, negotiating meaning, interpreting &amp; defining situations, including other’s experiences</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Goffman’s dramaturgical analysis</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Social constructionism (Berger &amp; Luckmann)</td>
<td>Everyday knowledge that shapes individual’s perceptions of the world.</td>
<td>Qualitative</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Harre’s ethogenic perspective</td>
<td>Rules and conventions of conduct</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between intellectualising and conative</td>
<td>Contemporary social theories</td>
<td>Anthony Giddens</td>
<td>The duality of agency (microsociology) and structure (macrosociology)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Juergen Habermas</td>
<td>Communicative interaction. Coordinated action.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conative</td>
<td>Weberian tradition action theory</td>
<td>Campbell’s version of interpretative action theory</td>
<td>The individual actor’s point of view. Intrapersonal processes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In contrast to social situationism and rational choice theories, both of which over-intellectualise human agency, Campbell promotes the traditional Weberian model where:

Action is likely to have a completely different character for the person performing it to the person who merely observes its performance. This is because ‘accomplishing an action’ is a complex process which frequently involves the actor in a good deal of largely covert, intra-subjective activity of a cathetic and conative as well as cognitive nature. (p. 49)

Rational actor or rational choice theories “ignore action in order to concentrate upon the processes of calculation and judgement underlying the decisions which individuals take and which lead them to embark on one course of action rather than another” (Campbell, 1996, p. 16). Campbell identifies the origin of rational action and rational choice theories in economics and political science. He notes that these theories do not assume that people behave rationally, “rather, they are more interested in seeing how much of human behaviour can be explained on the assumption that they do” (p. 11). He adds that “such perspectives take no more than a purely formal interest in the actor’s point of view” (p. 11).

In another camp reside the meaning-making and sense-making theories of phenomenology, ethnomethodology, symbolic interactionism, ethnogenic theory and social constructivism which “strangely have a similar pre-occupation with intellectual processes” (p. 16). Campbell adds that “… it is noticeable that neither alternative shows much interest in the emotive or conative dimensions of conduct or the aetiology of action” (p. 17).

Both the social situationist and rational choice theories eschew explanation in favour of description. Campbell argues that while exponents of these schools claim to be following the Weberian tradition of the analysis of action in terms of the actor’s point of view, they actually do not. Instead they emphasise how an individual’s action might be interpreted by observers according to the social conventions in a particular situation.
The Weberian, or more generally classical, position on action as described by Campbell incorporates the distinction between behaviour and action, discussed in Chapter 1 of the present work, with an additional distinction between action and social action. Campbell makes it clear that action is the superordinate concept:

A clear position is drawn between behaviour (usually envisaged as consisting largely of involuntary reactive responses) and action, defined as voluntary and subjectively meaningful conduct; and . . . a further contrast is drawn between action and social action, with the latter envisaged as a sub-type of the former (usually distinguished by the fact that the meaningful orientation is to others)…. The crucial feature of this classificatory scheme is that social action is a sub-type of the more general and basic category of action upon which it necessarily depends. The trichotomy thus comprises a fundamental contrast (behaviour/action), in which the second term, action, is then subjected to a further division (action/social action). (1996, p. 25)

Most of Campbell’s work is dedicated to a critical evaluation of the social situationist paradigm. Campbell identifies the key construct in social situationism as “social action”, which he regards as a poorly defined concept that can be taken to mean action whose meaning is defined by social situations. The traditional concept of action is generally either excluded from the subject matter of micro-sociology (and social psychology) or reduced to social action in particular contexts. As a result, the prevailing subject matter of sociology has become “situated conduct rather than action in the conventional sense” (p. 4). While there are several prongs to Campbell’s critique of “social situationism”, these fall into two interrelated groups. The first set of criticisms focuses on the exclusive focus on contextual determinism, and may be summarised in the following five points:

1. The focus is on “the representation of actions as if they were not really accomplishments of human beings at all, but rather the ‘product’ of social situations” (p. 135).

2. One corollary of this position is a failure to recognise non-social forms of action. In contrast to the social situationist view, the overwhelming
majority of actions can be identified without reference to the immediate social situation:

For although one may have to be in an auction before one can ‘bid’ or driving a car on a road before one can ‘signal a turn’, one does not have to be in a restaurant, for example, to be judged to be eating, or on a concert platform to be ‘singing’, or in front of a camera to be ‘smiling’, or in a church to be ‘praying’, or in a library to be ‘reading’, or in a race to be ‘running’. (p. 118)

3. Furthermore, social situationism is unable to account for actions whose meaning is independent of the immediate social context but are dependent on the cultural context. Actions such as

Winking, making rude gestures, blowing a kiss, signalling to someone to follow you, nodding, or shaking one’s head, do not (at least in British society) rely on situational context for their meaning. They are identifiable in almost any context. This is because they are culturally rather than situationally constituted. (p. 117)

4. Another corollary of over-reliance on social context is excessive reliance on rules, norms and conventions to explain action. Social situationism is blind to behaviour that does not “conform to the social norms or rules pertaining to the situation in which they occur” (p. 118). Therefore it is unable to provide an account of failed or mistaken actions.

5. In line with the focus on norms and conventions is the heavy emphasis on language production. Rather than studying how talk is used to accomplish various goals, situationists study how language patterns vary in different social contexts. Furthermore, there is an assumption that language is used in the accomplishment of exclusively communicative goals. In other words, there is an “abandonment of the study of motive for the study of motive talk” (p. 3).
Campbell’s second set of criticisms focuses upon the flipside of the contextual determinist argument. The emphasis on the contextual determinism of the immediate social situation is balanced by a de-emphasis, bordering on epistemological denial, of the concept of action from the actor’s point of view. This aspect of Campbell’s critique of social situationism can be summarised in four points:

1. The concept of action from the actor’s point of view is ignored in favour of the concept of social action from the observer’s point of view. For example, J. E. Goldthorpe justifies “identifying the beating heart of a dying man as a ‘social action’ on the grounds that it possesses a ‘social meaning’ for the relatives gathered around the bedside” (p. 49). Campbell adds, “Where action theory stresses the importance of discovering the actor’s definition of the situation, social action theory stresses the importance of understanding how the actor understands the conduct of others” (p. 36). Hence social situationist theories focus on intersubjectivity rather than subjectivity.

2. Actors’ accounts of their actions are considered not useable for the purpose of reaching an understanding of their actions.

3. The conative aspect of action is marginalised: “The question of how and why action occurs is always bracketed out, set aside in order to focus on the question of how that which has been performed is perceived by others as meaningful and hence as action” (p. 45).

4. A key concept in the conative perspective of action is intention. Social situationism is unable to distinguish between intended and unintended actions:

By attempting to exclude any reference to the subjective or ‘mental’ from identifying actions, the rule-constituted approach is unable either to provide any way of explaining ‘failed’ actions
Campbell gives a compelling example to illustrate the importance of intentions: “The difference between ‘giving a gift’... and ‘the offering of a bribe’ rests more upon the contrasting goals and intentions of the giver than it does upon the social situation in which it is performed” (p. 119).

In Campbell’s view, the theories of Jürgen Habermas and Anthony Giddens represent middle positions, with some aspects of their theories supporting the Weberian tradition and other aspects contradicting this position. In Campbell’s view, Habermas’ theory suffers from the tendency to reduce action to specifically communicative action. However he sees the more serious flaw in Habermas’ work, in that “it is a theory of interaction and hence not really a theory of action at all” (p. 18). Moreover, Habermas, like Giddens, “seems to want to distance himself from what he regards as the excessively individualistic nature of conventional theories” (p. 21).

Campbell argues that Giddens is not strictly an action theorist because his work aims to “transcend the traditional action/structure distinction” (p. 20) by means of the concept of structuration. While Giddens’ theory has the advantage of recognising that “much of an agent’s skilled performance rests on practical and not merely discursive consciousness” (p. 20), both he and Habermas suffer from the tendency to conflate action with social action. To his credit however, Giddens (1984) does recognise that all social structures and cultural systems, including semiotic systems, are only maintained across space and time because individuals enact them. Campbell’s critique however, demonstrates that there is more to action than its relationship with social structure.

It could be argued that there is a missing ingredient in the qualitative-interpretative tradition that is also missing in Campbell’s approach. This is the scientific or objective point of view that Giddens regards as the complement to the actor’s point of view. However, the scientific point of view is implicit in the
Weberian paradigm of sociology that Campbell defends. Campbell reminds us that for Weber, sociology was a science that used interpretative understandings as a first step in formulating a causal explanation of action. Campbell’s critique of social situationism is therefore in harmony with the realist approach outlined in Chapter 1 of the present work.

Campbell’s analysis demonstrates that we can add the widespread failure to provide a framework for understanding action to the list of deficiencies of the qualitative research tradition. The other deficiencies are a failure to give an adequate rationale for the bifurcation of qualitative and quantitative research approaches and the adoption of unviable idealist epistemologies. The strengths of the qualitative research tradition are its methodological innovations and these could well be adopted by the quantitative research tradition.

The exploration of the treatment of semiosis in this chapter yields a mixed picture. Neither the quantitative-empirical tradition nor the qualitative-interpretive traditions were fully equipped to investigate meaning phenomena. Fortunately, there were aspects of both traditions that were compatible with the realist triadic conceptualisation of the semiosis proposed in the present work. For example, while the work of Michon et al. (2003) served to illustrate some of the problems of the quantitative-empirical tradition, the work of Markel (1997) served as an exception to the general rule of marginalisation and misconceptualisation of semiosis in quantitative psychology. It is now time to examine how the psychological aspects of semiosis have been treated in semiotics.
CHAPTER 3: SEMIOSIS IN SEMIOTICS

Contemporary approaches of semiotics originate in the works of the American philosopher Charles Sanders Peirce (1839-1914) and the Swiss linguist, Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913). The works of Roman Jakobson (1960) and Bühler (1933/1982) are exemplary of the functionalist approach that evolved from Saussurian structuralism. The functionalist approach helped to inspire Michael Halliday’s Anglo-Australian “systemic-functional” school of linguistics. Scholars such as Hodge and Kress (1988) and van Leeuwen (2005) in turn used Halliday’s work to develop the broader theory of social semiotics. Social semiotics has been described as the “third force” (Meinhof 1994) in the field, standing along side Saussurian and Peircian semiotics. Hodge and Kress, however, argue that there is no cohesive Peircian tradition of semiotics:

There is not a Peircian countertradition, with solid achievements planted in American soil, ready to confront the European semiology of Saussure. But there is Peirce’s own work, unsystematic but full of sharp and illuminating observations on semiosis and thought and still waiting to be properly assimilated into general semiotic theory (1988, p.14)

Scholars who have worked in the field of semiotics have seldom attempted to examine the relevance of psychology to the field. It is safe to say that the neglect of psychology in the field of semiotics is even greater than the neglect of semiotics in the field of psychology. This problem began in the work of Saussure, who focused on signifiers, or systems of signifiers, at the expense of the two other elements of semiosis, the sign user and the states of affairs. Saussure’s primary aim was to establish linguistics as an autonomous discipline that could serve as a model for all semiotic systems. He therefore focused on the lines of demarcation between linguistics and other sciences. In order to shore up the boundaries between linguistics and other sciences, Saussure marginalised the non-arbitrary aspects of semiosis and the use or application of conventional rules in communicative contexts.
Functionalist thinkers such as Roman Jakobson, Karl Buhler and Michael Halliday were able partially to redress some of the problems in Saussure’s model and provide a foundation for the contemporary developments of systemic-functional linguistics and social semiotics. Upon detailed examination, however, it can be demonstrated that functionalism and its descendants have strong roots in Saussurian structuralism and perpetuate many of the problems inherent in Saussure’s original formulation. The primary problem is that the social functions of semiosis are narrowly conceived—from the perspective of semiotic structures and the conventions of social situations, rather than from a perspective that recognises the interaction between semiotic agents, social contexts, and semiotic resources. Concomitant with the neglect of semiotic agents is a neglect of the psychological aspects of semiotics.

Giddens’ (1984) concept of duality of structure partially addressed the problem of agentless psychosocial processes in that it provided conceptual scaffolding for an integration of the concepts of action and structure. As Campbell (1996) has demonstrated, however, there is more to the action than its relationship with social structure. Also useful in ameliorating the dearth of conceptualisations of agency are the semiotic concepts from Peirce, logical concepts from John Anderson, and contributions from philosophers such as Austin and Searle to the field of linguistic pragmatics. The more the weaknesses of the structuralist legacy are addressed, the more the relevance of psychology to semiotics becomes apparent.

3.1. SAUSSURE’S COURSE IN GENERAL LINGUISTICS

It could be argued that, apart from Noam Chomsky, no one rivals Ferdinand de Saussure for the position of most influential figure in linguistics. Saussure influenced not only linguists but also a range of scholars in the humanities and social sciences, such as Barthes (criticism), Levi-Strauss (anthropology) and Lacan (psychoanalysis). Saussure was a precocious youth,
publishing an influential paper at the age of twenty-one. Towards the end of his life, however, he published very little (Culler, 1976). The reason for Saussure’s silence is hinted at in a letter to a colleague, Antoine Meillet (4 January 1884). Its tone is one of circumspection and disillusionment:

For a long time I have been above all preoccupied with the logical classification of linguistic facts and with the classification of the points of view from which we treat them; and I am more and more aware of the immense amount of work that would be required to show the linguist what he is doing … the utter inadequacy of current terminology, the need to reform it, and in order to do that, to demonstrate what sort of object language is, continually spoils my pleasure in philology … this will lead, against my will, to a book in which I shall explain, without enthusiasm or passion, why there is not a single term used in linguistics which has any meaning for me. Only after this, I confess, will I be able to take up my work at the point I left off. (quoted in Culler, 1976, p. 15)

In short, Saussure’s interest in linguistic research was tainted because the fundamentals of linguistic science, for him, remained unanswered. In the *Course in General Linguistics* (1916/1983), Saussure attempted to address these fundamental issues. The *Course* is much bolder in scope than the planned critical review alluded to in the letter to Meillet, for it provides a new model of linguistics.

The *Course* was reconstructed from student notes of lectures Saussure gave at the University of Geneva between 1906 and 1911, and from Saussure’s own manuscripts (Culler 1976). As Culler notes, Saussure’s reconstructed work represents a provisional stage of his thought and this makes the task of explicating Saussure’s theory all the more difficult:

If he had believed that he had solved the fundamental problems of linguistics in an unequivocal way, if he had not felt that he was still grasping towards a satisfactory formulation of ideas which he had but glimpsed, doubtless he would have written the book himself. Since he did not, we must make an effort to grasp a thought which is not yet fully born but which, even in its nascent state, was able to exert a powerful influence on succeeding generations of linguists. (1976, p. 11)
Matters are further complicated because it is not clear to what extent Saussure’s lecture notes are free of interpolations. In the opinion of Koerner (1984), Saussure’s editors “introduced so many changes to the students’ notes at their disposal when compiling the text, that a number of statements resulted that are in fact in clear disagreement with Saussure’s position” (p.17).

One unambiguous theme that did emerge from the currently available “vulgate” version of Saussure’s Course is the anti-realist view of linguistics throughout the work. When it comes to other disciplines however, Saussure is a realist. This is illustrated in his conceptualisation of the basic units of sciences such as zoology, astronomy, and all semiological systems apart from language:

In most scientific domains, the question of units does not even arise: they are given in advance. In zoology, the animal is the obvious unit. In astronomy, likewise, there are items already separated out in space: the stars, planets, etc. In chemistry, one can study the nature and composition of bichromate of potash without worrying for a moment about whether it is a well defined object. (1916/1983, p. 34)

In these non-linguistic sciences, the basic units of investigation exist independently of the investigators point of view. In contrast, language has no such units (Saussure, 1916/1983, p. 149). Rather, linguistic units are immanent to the investigator’s point of view:

Elsewhere there are things, certain objects, which one is free to consider afterwards from different points of view. In our case there are, primarily, points of view, with the aid of which, secondarily, one creates things . . . no thing, no object, is given for a single instant in itself. (quoted in Benveniste, 1971, p. 35)

While Saussure saw the constructive role of point of view as the unique aspect of linguistic science, Culler suggests that it became the Zeitgeist of the modern era:

How does one cope systematically with the apparent chaos of the modern world? This question was being asked in a variety of fields, and the replies which Saussure gives—that you cannot hope to attain an absolute or God-like view of things but must choose a perspective, and that within this
perspective objects are defined by their relations with one another rather than by essences of some kind—are exemplary (1976, p. 8).

In short, Saussure’s view of linguistics is in keeping with the anti-realist position that the objects of knowledge do not exist independently of the knower but are somehow created in the act of knowing.

According to Saussure, it was not only the relationships between the investigator and the linguistic objects of investigation, but also the network of relationships between the objects of linguistics that operated according to anti-realist principles. Saussure believed that linguistic units depend for their existence on their relationship with one another, whereas the objects of study in other disciplines, such as physics and chemistry, exist independently of one another. In other words, the elements of language are constituted by their relations with other elements in the system to which they belong. Saussure believed that this anti-realist principle did not apply to other semiotic systems:

A language has the character of a system based entirely on the contrasts between its concrete units. . . . It has no immediately perceptible entities. And yet one cannot doubt that they exist, or that the interplay of these units is what constitutes linguistic structure. That is undoubtedly a characteristic which distinguishes languages from all other semiological institutions. (1916/1983, p. 149)

As demonstrated in Chapter 1, there cannot be linguistic relations without linguistic objects to stand in those relations. Since Saussure allows that the science of semiotics (or semiology as he called it) can have units of analysis that exist independently of their relations, Saussure’s conception of semiotics is logically sounder than his conception of linguistics. As will be discussed below, Saussure’s semiotics is in many ways, however, an extension of his linguistic theory.

It is paradoxical that Saussure is one of the founders of semiotics considering that his observations on the possibility of extending his linguistic model to the broader arena of culture amount to a few pages in the Course in
"General Linguistics" (Culler, 1976). Moreover, these passages express his ambivalence about the place for linguistics within the discipline of semiotics. In the following passage Saussure describes linguistics as “only one branch” of semiotics:

It is . . . possible to conceive of a science which studies the role of signs as part of social life. It would be part of social psychology. . . . We shall call it semiology (from the Greek semeion, ‘sign’). It would investigate the nature of signs and the laws governing them. Since it does not yet exist, one cannot say for certain that it will exist. But it has a right to exist, a place ready for it in advance. Linguistics is only one branch of this general science. The laws which semiology will discover will be the laws applicable in linguistics, and linguistics will be thus assigned a clearly defined place in the field of human knowledge. (Saussure, 1916/1983, p. 33)

In the following passage, Saussure also implies that an interdisciplinary approach is required:

Language in its entirety has many different and disparate aspects. It lies astride the boundaries separating various domains. It is at the same time physical, physiological and psychological. It belongs both to the individual and to society. No classification of human phenomena provides any single place for it, because language as such has no discernible unity. (1916/1983, p. 25)

These views are largely ignored in the rest of the Course. In fact Saussure asserts a diametrically opposite position which excludes disciplines such as social psychology and he superimposes unity on the field of language by means of his structuralist model. Saussure suppresses his vision of linguistics as a branch of semiotics and semiotics as a branch of social psychology because his primary goal is to promote the autonomy and internal coherence of the field of linguistics. Harris (1987) notes that Saussure ensured the autonomy of linguistics by guaranteeing it in advance “a privileged position within semiology which it lacks under the hegemony of any other science” (Harris, 1987, p. 31-32). Saussure states that it is necessary to study language in itself, rather than “as a function of something else” (1916/1983, p. 34). His positioning of language as the centre of semiotic systems is clearly illustrated in the following: “A language is a system of
signs expressing ideas, and hence comparable to writing, the deaf-dumb alphabet, symbolic rites, forms of politeness, military signals, and so on. It is simply the most important of such systems” (1916/1983, p. 33).

Harris (1983) notes that Saussure devotes much of the *Course* to cutting “through the perplexing maze of existing approaches to the study of linguistic phenomena by setting up a unified discipline, based upon a single clearly defined concept: that of the *linguistic sign*” (p. x). More precisely, it is the system of signifiers or language structure that Saussure regards as the ordering principle for a mass of heterogeneous linguistic facts:

A language as a structured system ... is both a self-contained whole and a principle of classification. As soon as we give linguistic structure a pride of place among the facts of language, we introduce a natural order into an aggregate which lends itself to no other classification (1916/1983, p. 25).

By emphasising linguistic structure or the systemic aspect of language, Saussure separated linguistics from a host of other alternative approaches to language, including the study of language as an auditory, vocal, historical and social-transactional phenomenon (Culler, 1976, Harris, 1987). These, Saussure argued, were not the central subject matter of linguistics and to take these various aspects of language into account risked opening “the door to various sciences—psychology, anthropology, prescriptive grammar, philology, and so on—which are to be distinguished from linguistics” (1916/1983, pp. 24-25).

In Saussure’s *Course*, the concept of structure stands in opposition to the notion of language use or communicative action (*parole*). *Structure* is synonymous with *system*, or *langue*, in Saussure’s framework. Not only did Saussure set langue and parole in opposition, he marginalised parole and a series of other concepts that did not fit in with his structuralist vision. Hodge and Kress call this set of marginalised elements “Saussure’s rubbish bin” (1988, p. 15). Saussure’s rubbish bin is represented by the shaded areas in the following table.
Table 8: The structure of Saussure’s structuralism
(Hodge and Kress, 1988, p. 17)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Semiotic codes</th>
<th>Language</th>
<th>Systemic aspect of language (Langue)</th>
<th>Synchrony</th>
<th>Paradigmatic rules</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Non-linguistic semiotic systems</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Extra-semiotic phenomena: Culture &amp; Society</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Parole</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Thus synchrony and diachrony are both part of the systemic or structural aspect of language. Saussure excludes the diachronic aspect, or the historical evolution of language structure, in favour of the synchronic aspect, which involves the study of language structure in a single point in time. When it comes to the opposition between the paradigmatic rules (or rules for selection of language elements) and syntagmatic rules (or rules of combination of language elements), Saussure highlights paradigmatic rules while not excluding syntagmatic, or combinatorial, rules.

Hodge and Kress’ (1988) analysis of the *Course* goes beyond the basic assumption that Saussure was striving to establish a new and revitalised linguistics, to a reconstruction of Saussure’s motivations for marginalising elements of the binary oppositions listed above. Hodge and Kress invoke the concept of the return of the repressed:

At the level of language, he studied mainly words or phrases, not larger structures of discourse. This could be seen as a concern with the individual word, rather than with the structures in which words exist. But at a deeper level that concern displays the same desire to stay with that which can be fixed and therefore known, even if the price is to see only chaos in the life
and discourse that swirls outside the domain of linguistics or semiotics; in parole, in society, in history, in the intractable material world of objects and events. The strength of his attempt to escape the world of processes reveals his fascinated recognition of these forces, even if they appear in his theory only as negations. (1988, p. 17)

It is ironic that Hodge and Kress rely on psychological concepts such as the return of the repressed and authorial intention given that they have gone to similar lengths as Saussure to exclude psychology from their approach. While there has been much controversy about the topic of authorial intention, the concept is nevertheless crucial in a comprehensive analysis of texts (Gibbs, 1999). Some pragmatic theorists even postulate that intention has primacy over convention in determining meaning (Searle, 1979). Largely as a result of Saussure’s influence, received models of semiotics have formally excluded analyses that utilise concepts such as action and intention.

3.2 SAUSSURIAN STRUCTURALISM

A closer analysis of the concept of structure in structuralist semiotics will reveal the need for a more advanced model that incorporates the explanatory concepts of action and agency as well as structure. According to Desdecombes (1979), structuralism and semiotics are synonymous in some contexts: “When structuralism is spoken of in France, one does not as a rule think of the method of structuralist analysis as such, but of the application of this method to sign systems” (p. 92). Desdecombes adds that the relationship between the structuralist approach and semiotics is nevertheless a contingent rather than necessary one:

In theory, nothing predisposes structuralism to any privileged bearing upon the sign. Nor does anything oblige the science of the sign to be exclusively structuralist. There is none the less an affinity between the method and the field of research. (p. 92).

It is fortunate that semiotics is not limited to a structuralist approach, for the focus on the structure of systems of signifiers in structuralism is at the expense of an appreciation of the relationship between sign users and signifiers, as well as the
relationships between signifiers and the states of affairs that they signify. The problem is not with the concept of structure itself, but with the manner in which it has been applied in Saussurian structuralism.

The core of Saussurian structuralism can be seen as a set of trivial analytic truths. This may explain Chomsky’s (1989) dismissive attitude towards Saussurianism:

What does it mean to say that there are structures and there are oppositions, and there’s a *signifiant* and a *signifie*, and so on. . . . Yes, there will be things that are opposed to one another. ‘Something is black or it’s not black. These things can’t be false and they tell you nothing. Just about any imaginable system could have these properties – unless it’s continuous or probabilistic or something. It’s not going to happen in that case. But any discrete system that isn’t just a set of random dots on a tachistoscope or something like that is going to be able to be described in these terms. It tells you nothing.’ (p. 32)

Chomsky’s attitude to structuralism in linguistics is echoed by Runciman’s (1970) attitude to structuralism in sociology: “As a doctrine, ‘societies are structures’ means little more than ‘societies are societies’; as a method, ‘look for the structure’ means little more than ‘look for the right explanation’, or, perhaps, ‘the explanation lies deeper than you think’”. (p. 51). Chomsky’s analysis is nevertheless informative, for it reveals the basic features of structures. Firstly there is the feature of opposition. Saussure spoke not so much about logical oppositions such as *black* versus *not black*. Rather, he referred to linguistic semantic oppositions such as *black* versus *white*. Secondly, Chomsky reminds us that the elements of Saussure’s structures are not continuous (or analogical) but discrete (or digital). Thirdly, Chomsky reminds us that an important feature of structure is organisation; structure is not random. Finally, Chomsky alludes to the fact that structure is a property of *systems*. Hence, in dismissing the concept of Saussurian structure as uninformative, Chomsky has listed or alluded to four, arguably meaningful, features of the concept.
It is ironic that Chomsky himself has been described as a structuralist, albeit in a slightly broader sense of the term:

It is in virtue of his attack upon empiricism, his resuscitation of Kantian-like concepts of inborn mental structures which limit what form our actions can take, their intellectual shape, that Chomsky has exerted his philosophical influence. So far, he and the structuralists can properly be run together. (Passmore, 1985, p. 38)

For Saussure, it was not mental structures which limited the form that human communicative actions could take, but the social and conventional language system.

Another feature of Saussure’s approach to language structures is his synchronic (ahistorical) focus. Saussure was determined to study language as it was at one point in time. Sturrock (1986) highlights the uniqueness of Saussure’s synchronic approach by comparing it to the diachronic (historical) models of linguistics that dominated in Saussure’s time:

A system, like a structure, is formed of elements which coexist; it cannot be formed of elements which are successive. It may today seem a relatively trivial stipulation that language be studied as a system, but that is only because we have become so accustomed to the synchronic point of view. In Saussure’s time it was not a trivial stipulation because it went against the grain among linguists, who resisted the abstraction which it involved of language from history (p. 6).

Saussure conceived linguistic structures as closed systems which are not only sealed off from history, but also from sign users and states of affairs. By comparison, for Piaget (1971) the notion of closed systems was not a mandatory requirement for a structural approach but nevertheless useful as a first approximation:

As a first approximation, we may say that a structure is a system of transformations. Inasmuch as it is a system and not a mere collection of elements and their properties, these transformations involve laws: the structure is preserved or enriched by the interplay of its transformation laws, which never yield results external to the system nor employ elements
that are external to it. In short, the notion of structure is comprised of three key ideas: the idea of wholeness, the idea of transformation, and the idea of self-regulation (p. 5).

Like Chomsky, and in contrast to Saussure, Piaget was concerned with mental structures. In contrast to Saussure and Chomsky, Piaget also found evidence for the openness of mental structures in the form of phenomena such as accommodation (where the organism adapts itself to new information) and assimilation, the complementary process by which the organism adapts new information to its existing mental structures. Tallis (1988) similarly argued that structures (or systems) are not necessarily closed and cites as an example of an open structure the human nervous system:

The nervous system has wholeness – its function culminates in the moment of unconsciousness; it has rules of internal transformation, which have been described in great detail, at synapses, sense endings, in the cerebellum and in the cerebral cortex; and it is the supreme instance of a self-regulating system, subserving the almost miraculous self-regulation or homeostasis of the body as a whole. These features are in fact more incontrovertibly present in the nervous system than they are in language. Is the brain therefore “sealed off” from the extra-cerebral reality? Of course not. Precisely the opposite is the case: the brain is that by virtue of which the body is open to an outside world – is explicitly “worlded”…. Instead of blocking access to or genuine openness to the environment, the structure permits the events provoked in the brain by the environment to become the basis of the body’s being explicitly environed. (p. 77)

Thus structures may possess features considered important in structural semiotics, such as wholeness, without being closed. One of the advantages of a model of semiotics which postulates open structures is that it is compatible with the principles of realism, allowing the semiotic systems to “hook up” with the world. Conversely, one of the correlates of the postulation of closed structures in semiotics is the, epistemologically idealist, separation of the language from states of affairs in the world. The consequence of this closure is that structuralism has few resources for conceptualising the relationship between signifiers and states of affairs. Nor does it have resources for conceptualising the relationship between the sign user and systems of signifiers. As a result, structuralist semiotics has a
tendency to explain semantic relationships in terms of syntactic relationships and to omit discussion of the language user.

3.2.1. Reduction of semantics to syntax

In contrast to the triadic conceptualisation of semiosis, where someone uses a signifier or system of signifiers to stand for something else, Saussure and some of his followers adopted the notion that units of meaning are constituted by their relations within a system of signifiers. Piaget argues that a common feature of all versions of structuralism is “an ideal (perhaps a hope) of intrinsic intelligibility supported by the postulate that structures are self sufficient and that, to grasp them, we do not have to make reference to all sorts of extraneous elements” 1971, pp. 4-5). The quest for intrinsic intelligibility makes the proverbial search for the pot of the gold at the end of the rainbow look like a scientific expedition. As discussed in Chapter 1, semiosis is an irreducibly triadic relationship—between sign users, signifiers and states of affairs—and cannot be reduced to any of the terms of that relationship nor can it be reduced to dyadic relationships.

Lepschy’s (1970) classification of approaches to meaning is relevant here. On the one hand, there are correspondence and use theories, where meaning is thought of as a relationship which holds between the system and something else. On the other hand, componential theories such as structuralism postulate a limited inventory of features which combine to form an unlimited number of meanings (p. 38-39). Structuralism is founded on the notion that meaning exists in differential relationships within the system of basic elements. The following example from Saussure illustrates the tendency to attempt to explain meaning phenomena solely by reference to relationships in a language system:

In isolation, Nacht and Nächte are nothing: the opposition between them is everything. In other words, one might express the relation Nacht vs Nächte by an algebraic formula \( a/b \), where \( a \) and \( b \) are not simple terms,
but each represents a complex of relations. The language is, so to speak, an algebra which has only complex terms. Some of the oppositions it includes are more important than others. But ‘units’ and ‘grammatical facts’ are only different names for different aspects of the same general fact: the operation of linguistic oppositions. (Saussure, 1916/1983, p. 168)

In other words, linguistic units do not exist, in Saussure’s view, without linguistic oppositions. This begs the realist question of how a unit can be opposed to another unit unless it can also exist independently of the oppositional relationship. For Saussure and his structuralist followers, it is not only semiotic oppositions that create semiotic units, but semiotic relationships in general:

Meaning is not considered as deriving from any relationship between signs and the real world, but is the result of mutual relations between signs within the context of an abstract and purely formal system of an algebraic nature. (Boklund-Lagopoulos and Lagopoulos, 2004, p. 1016)

Such an approach reduces semiotics to information theory, despite the authors’ initial distancing of semiotics from such a position. According to Boklund-Lagopoulos and Lagopoulos (2004), the fact that semiotics is the study of the “relationships between (at least) two planes—the signifier and the signified—differentiates semiotics from information theory, which deals only with the plane of the signifier” (p. 1016). While the authors postulate two semiotic planes, that of the signifier and the signified, the plane of the signified is regarded as a product of the algebraic plane of the signifier, which is constituted by a network of arbitrary relationships. In other words, it is assumed that the language system determines meaning. In this model, the plane of signifieds is not influenced by reality but by the system of signifiers. And the system of signifiers is governed by an abstract and arbitrary set of rules. As Potter & Wetherell state, “The claim that an underlying system involving rules of acceptable sequences and combinations can generate and make sense of cultural phenomena is basic to semiology” (1987, p. 24). Since rules are regarded as immanent to the algebraic network signifiers, semiotics is artificially insulated from the study of causal relationships implied in the notion of someone using something to stand for something else. Thus, in the Saussurian model of semiotics, the sign vehicle is more than a vehicle: it is also
the driver and the destination. In contrast, from the point of view of a triadic conceptualisation of semiosis, people use sign-systems to communicate and some of the regularities in their communication become established to the point where they are abstracted as rules or systems that can be disseminated in the linguistic community and used as a resource for communication. A more detailed exploration of the semiotic conceptualisation of rules will further illustrate the need for a triadic conception of the sign where the focus is not just on the signifying system but also on the agent of semiosis and the extra-semiotic objectives, objects, and states of affairs to which the agent is oriented.

The language system, or *langue*, as Saussure termed it, consists of two types of rules: those governing combination and those governing the selection of elements. Rules of combination influence the range of permissible constructions along the linear dimension of meaning. *The cat sat on the mat* and *The mat was sat upon by the cat* are a permissible constructions according to the semiotic combinatorial rules of English while *Cat the sat mat on the* is not.

Rules of selection influence the range of available alternatives to a particular signifier. These rules can be illustrated with a feature of the Microsoft Word computer program, by means of which I am writing the present work. In this program, the synonyms for mat are listed as: *rug, carpet, doormat, bathmat, pad, wad, table mat* and *mouse mat*. Because this feature of the program assists with the selection of elements, it is an example of what Saussure called the “associative” relationship between signifiers. Jakobson renamed it the “paradigmatic” relationship. The structuralist semiotic claim that the semiotic code determines the constitution of such semantic paradigms belies the fact that all of these mat-like things have a similar real-world function. While this systemic paradigm may influence the social practice of the generation and grouping of mat-like things, the grouping precedes the systemic paradigm.

The influence of semantic paradigms on the identification of objects is clearly seen in the adoption of nautical terms in aeronautical terminology. The
words crew, cockpit, deck, bulkhead, hatch, rudder, and aft are all used to
describe parts of a space shuttle (National Aeronautics and Space Administration)
and all have nautical origins (Hoad, 1996). However the extra-linguistic parallels
between space craft and sea craft are also important in determining the
aeronautical paradigm. The permeability of systemic paradigms to non-
conventional states of affairs suggests that a realist perspective is the appropriate
framework for the study of semiosis. This realist perspective can be contrasted
with the representationist tendencies in the received models of semiosis, where
sign systems are seen as the source of representations or “constructions” of reality.
For example, Eggins (2004), in her introduction to systemic-functional linguistics,
states:

Semiotic theory demonstrates that the world is not out there as some
absolute, determined reality simply to be labelled (and therefore talked
about) in only one possible way. Reality is constructed through the
oppositions encoded in the semiotic systems of the language we use. (p.18)

Eggins’ perspective is a legacy from the writings of Saussure and is common in
the field of semiotics. It is problematic because it conflates realism with
dogmatism and espouses a unidirectional, and therefore simplistic, notion of
causality whereby the oppositions in a linguistic system somehow construct
reality. But semantic oppositions, especially denotative ones such as hot versus
cold temperature, are as much a consequence of human experience as a
construction of it. This can be further illustrated by examining connotative
paradigms. For example the connotations of mat include, domestic, prosaic, lowly
and utilitarian. If someone is described as a “door mat”, they are identified as a
subservient person open to exploitation. While the use of “door mat” in this sense
has become conventionalised, the use of the term “door mat” to refer to an
exploited person is not completely arbitrary. It is chosen because of its association
with dirt and the ground. There is a range of other household items, such as “door
hinge” or “book shelf”, which would not be as suitable in describing a submissive
and abused person as they do not have the same real world association with the
ground and dirt.
Semiotics in the Saussurian tradition eschews references to real states of affairs and looks inwards to the language system to explain connotative meaning. Saussure postulated two planes of semiosis, namely, the plane of signifiers and the plane of signifieds representing aspects of the world. Barthes (1968), drawing on the work of Louis Hjelmslev, promoted the idea of a third plane of semiosis in order to add a connotative or mythological dimension to Saussure’s denotative semiotics. Connotation was defined in terms of second order signification. In the case of first order signification, a signifier stands for a signified to form a sign. In the case of second order signification, the sign itself becomes a signifier for another signified. Thus the signifier *cat* denotes the animal sitting on the mat but also connotes, at a level of second order signification, concepts such as *slinky, subtle, graceful, elegant, sly, stealthy* and *feminine*. In received models of semiotics, this clustering of concepts is explained without reference to the characteristics of cats or the characteristics of the social groups that describe cats. Psychosocial phenomena such as patriarchy, the domestication of animals, anthropomorphism, or any phenomena which explicitly involve the sign user are seen as effects of semiotic systems, rather than being seen as factors which could affect semiotic systems.

Roman Jakobson, one of Saussure’s successors, revised Saussure’s view of structural relationships and thereby goes some of the way towards a realist position. Unfortunately, Jakobson’s sounder approach to semiotic structure did not prevail over Saussure’s original conceptualisation. Jakobson argued that “it is obvious that [while] the grammatical category of the plural presupposes and implies the existence of the opposite category, what legitimates its existence in the language, is its own positive value, i.e., the designation of a plurality” (1978, p. 64).

For Jakobson, the notion of linguistic units being constituted by their relations is true of phonological oppositions but not true of grammatical or semantic oppositions. According to Jakobson, while phonemes have a “purely differential
and negative character” (1978, p. 64), it is an overgeneralisation to apply this principle to all linguistic units:

Saussure gives us an example from the German: the singular *Nacht* ‘night’, and the plural *Nächte* ‘nights’. It is true that the two members of this pair mutually presuppose each other, but we cannot go along with Saussure when he tells us: ‘Taken in isolation neither *Nacht* nor *Nächte* are anything’. We cannot accept this, because for all speakers *Nächte* is an independent and direct designation of a concrete plurality…. All opposition of grammatical categories necessarily has a positive content, whereas the opposition of two phonemes never has. Phonemes, according to Saussure’s *Course*, are above all else oppositional, relative, and negative entities. Now grammatical categories are also oppositional and relative entities, but they are not negative. This, then, is the distinction which has been confused. (1978, pp. 64-65)

Many of Saussure’s heirs – post-structuralists and deconstructionists such as Derrida (1982) – have not come to this recognition. This is illustrated in their continued efforts to explain meaning in terms of the relations between elementary units abstracted from their qualities. They speak of “difference” and “position” but these are spatial metaphors of meaning rather than meaning itself. Eco (1976), for example, concluded:

A cultural unit ‘exists’ and is recognised insofar as there exists another one which is opposed to it. It is the relationship between the various terms of a system of cultural units which subtracts from each one of the terms what is conveyed by the others (p. 73).

In contrast, Peirce was clearly a realist about signifiers (or, in looser terms, signs):

Since a sign is not identical with the thing signified, but differs from the latter in some respects, it must plainly have some characteristics which belong to the thing itself, and have nothing to do with its representative function (1868/1991, p. 68).

Jakobson also had a realist attitude to grammatical and semantic units in that he acknowledged that they have an existence independent of their oppositional relationships. In his view, units such as the singular and plural versions of a morpheme exist independently of other linguistic units and they designate
concrete objects outside of the language system. Jakobson was not a realist, however, when it came to phonemes, as he subscribed to the Saussurian structuralist view that phonemes do not have a “positive content”. Instead, Saussure and Jakobson believed the content of phonemes is determined entirely by their place in the network of other phonemes.

It could be argued that it is an empirical question as to which linguistic units are constituted by their relations and which linguistic units have an independent existence beyond their relations in a network of signifiers. From an Andersonian realist point of view, this is not an empirical question because, logically, any entity must have a positive content by virtue of which it is related to other units. In other words, there can be no such thing as entities created by an abstract system of relations; all relations must have independently existing terms which stand in those relations.

Trnka (1964) articulates a position on the question of structural relationships which is consistent with realism because he appears to acknowledge the logical constraint that linguistic relations presuppose the existence of “relators” or elements that stand in the relation:

Structuralism may be defined as the trend in linguistics which is concerned with analysing relationships between the segments of a language, conceived as a hierarchically arranged whole. The question may be asked whether the segments or the relationships are primary, but this problem cannot be solved at the present stage of our knowledge, at least not by linguists alone. It is clear, however, that both relators and relations are coexisting and correlated entities which cannot appear separately from each other. (p. 468)

Language is a hierarchically arranged system because non-meaningful basic units, the phonemes, are combined according to rules, to form meaningful higher order units. Trnka reframes the tendency to assert the primacy of relationships over units in the language system as a question of emphasis and sensibly rejects the incoherent notion of language segments that are constituted by their relations. The notion of relations that construct objects is incoherent because it contradicts the
logical principle that things must have an existence independent of their relations with other things.

While the structuralist doctrine on relations has been used to support a model where the language system leaves a dominant imprint on sign users and frames their interpretation of states of affairs, Murphy and Andre’s (1993) research on two important linguistic relations, antonymy and synonymy, suggests a contrary view. They demonstrated that relationships among adjectival antonyms and synonyms were governed by the concepts that underly words rather than by lexical relationships. This is because the adjectives in question were interpreted differently when presented in a noun phrase compared to when they were presented in isolation. In order to account for the contextual variations in meaning of synonyms and antonyms, a structuralist approach would have to posit an empirically implausible number of rules to account for changes in the meanings of adjectival antonyms and synonyms as a function of their context of various noun phrases:

One possible response for the lexical position is to suggest that the antonyms or synonyms of whole phrases are stored in the lexicon. This suggestion seems to stretch the bounds of what must be represented in the lexicon. Not only must the more than 50,000 words known to an educated person be stored, this proposal would add the much larger number of noun phrases along with the relations for each phrase. Of course, antonymy and synonymy are not the only lexical relations that would have to be represented (p. 316).

### 3.2.2. Valorisation of the arbitrary sign

Saussure’s conceptualisation of the arbitrary nature of the sign also enhances the image of linguistics as an autonomous discipline. There are, however, arguments against the view that linguistic signs are purely arbitrary. Saussure himself acknowledged the existence of natural signs, where the relationship between signifier and signified is based on a spatiotemporal relationship that exists independently of human intentions or conventions. An example of a natural sign is red spots signifying measles. The connection between
red spots and measles involves a causal process where the paramyxovirus attacks the host. A closer analysis of Saussure’s conceptualisation of arbitrariness reveals that there is in fact a continuum between arbitrary and non-arbitrary signs. The existence of this continuum forms the foundation for another argument against the view that linguistics and semiotics are autonomous from psychology.

Signs are said to be arbitrary because the association between the signifier and signified could have been otherwise. The arbitrariness of signs is easily illustrated by the fact that various languages use different signifiers to signify the same thing. For example, in English, the signifier for a popular pet is *dog*; in Croatian *pas* refers to the same animal. This illustrates the point that any signifier can do the job of signifying as long there is an agreement within a language community about the rule or convention involved in pairing the signifier with a signified.

Another example of an arbitrary sign is the Australian “Give Way” traffic sign. The road sign (signifier) represents the injunction (signified) to wait and give priority to the transit of other vehicles at an intersection before proceeding through the intersection. Because the signifier-signified relationship is arbitrary, a differently shaped or coloured “Give Way” sign may have served its purpose just as well—as long as there was a consensus in preference and mutual understanding about its use. In North America, for example, a Yield sign serves the same purpose.

Mathematical symbols are also arbitrary. In the domain of probability statistics, the Greek letter $\alpha$ is used to represent the probability of a false positive result. The Greek letter $\beta$ represents the probability of a false negative result. Since there is no tangible relationship between the symbol and what it represents, apart from that given by convention, these are arbitrary symbols.

Signifiers are also arbitrary, to some extent, in their semantic scope, or boundaries with other signifiers. Thus, in Croatian, the signifier *žena* means both
woman and wife. The English language words partition the same semantic field, referred to by the Croatian žena, into two. It is a common finding that words in one language do not correspond neatly with the words in another language. There are cases where a concept that is expressed with one lexeme in one language can only be expressed with a phrase in another language:

When we consider the distinctions of meaning that are lexicalised in particular language-systems, we see that it is frequently the case that one language will pack into a single lexical item (i.e., will make paradigmatic) information which in another language must be conveyed, if it can be conveyed at all in the system, by means of collocation (i.e., by syntagmatic modification). For example, in Turkish, there is no word meaning “brother” and no word meaning “sister”; the lexeme “kardes”, covers both, and it must be combined with another lexeme in order to draw the distinction … between brother and sister. (Lyons, 1977, p. 242)

It should be noted however, that the boundary between signifiers can only be arbitrary to some degree. For example, it is to some degree arbitrary whether a language community uses one word to refer to male and female siblings, whether it uses separate words for each sex, or both types of signifiers. The boundary between signifiers is not arbitrary, however, to the extent that it is constrained by the real world kinship structures. Thus, while dogs have been valued as family pets and referred to as “man’s best friend”, and as “part of the family”, the English word “sibling” does not conventionally refer to family pets such as dogs. The semantic scope of the word sibling does not include family pets because of extra-linguistic constraints on how families are constituted and conceptualised.

Saussure argues that since language exhibits the purest examples of arbitrary and conventional signs, language is the semiological system par excellence:

The main object of study in semiology will … be the class of systems based upon the arbitrary nature of the sign. For any means of expression accepted in a society rests in principle upon a collective habit, or on convention, which comes to the same thing. Signs of politeness, for instance, although often endowed with a certain natural expressiveness (prostrating oneself nine times on the ground is the way to greet an emperor of China) are none
the less fixed by rule. It is this rule which renders them obligatory, not their intrinsic value. We may therefore say that signs which are entirely arbitrary convey better than others the ideal semiological process. That is why the most complex and the most widespread of all systems of expression, which is the one we find in human languages, is also the most characteristic of all. In this sense, linguistics serves as a model for the whole of semiology, even though languages represent only one type of semiological system.

(Saussure, 1916/1983, pp. 100-101)

Saussure argues that other aspects of culture can be considered “in terms of the laws of semiology” (1916/1983, p. 35). However, linguistics is the most semiological aspect of culture because it most clearly exhibits the common denominator which unites the branches of semiology: the arbitrariness of the sign. Arbitrary signs, Saussure claims, “convey better than others the ideal semiological process” (p. 101). Hence “linguistics serves as a model for the whole of semiology, even though languages represent only one type of semiological system” (p. 101). Barthes (1968) was inspired by Saussure’s argument about the immaculate arbitrariness of the linguistic sign to declare that semiology is a branch of linguistics rather than vice versa. In contrast, Peirce did not attribute any special standing to arbitrary signs. Instead he focused on three types of relationships between signifiers and their objects:

Every sign is determined by its object, either first, by partaking in the characters of the object, when I call the sign an Icon; secondly, by being really and in its individual existence connected with the individual object, when I call the sign an Index; thirdly … it will be interpreted as denoting its object in consequence of a habit [which term I use as including a natural disposition], when I call the sign a Symbol (1906/1991, p. 251)

Interestingly, Peirce specified that his concept of habit included the concept of natural disposition, which implies that symbols can have a non-conventional nature. In contrast, Saussure referred to a “collective habit” or convention. Peirce also defined symbols as “signs that represent their objects essentially because they will be so interpreted” (1908/1991, p. 270) or because “the mind associates the sign with its object” (1885/1991, p. 183). Peirce’s formulations make clear both the triadic nature of signs and their psychological basis. Unfortunately, Eco (1979)
interpreted Peirce’s conceptualisation of semiosis along formalist lines designed to exclude the agent of semiosis:

It is clear that the ‘subjects’ of Peirce’s ‘semiosis’ are not human subjects but rather three abstract semiotic entities, the dialectic between which is not affected by concrete communicative behaviour. According to Peirce, a sign is “something which stands to somebody for something in some respect or capacity”. . . . A sign can stand for something else to somebody only because this ‘standing-for’ relation is mediated by an interpretant. I do not deny that Peirce also thought of the interpretant (which was another sign translating and explaining the first one, and so on ad infinitum) as a psychological event in the mind of a possible interpreter; I only maintain that it is possible to interpret Peirce’s definition in a non-anthropomorphic way. (p. 15)

Hence Eco, like Saussure, valorises the abstract, conventional and arbitrary code system whilst downplaying the origin of the code in human action and human transactions with signifiers.

Structuralist semiotics is distanced from the social and behavioural sciences by the placement of arbitrary signs at the centre of linguistics and semiology. One reason that such a strategy is limited is that arbitrary and motivated signs are best conceptualised as two poles of a continuum. Saussure’s example of “prostrating oneself nine times on the ground” as a sign of politeness when greeting the emperor of China can serve to illustrate this point. This signifier is partly arbitrary and partly motivated (natural or non-arbitrary) because there is a real relationship, not just a conventional relationship, between proximity to the ground and self-abasement. Moreover, while it may be arbitrary whether one prostrates oneself eight or nine times before the emperor, the very fact of multiple repetition of a submissive self-abasing act is naturally or non-arbitrarily related to the depth of self-abasement. Saussure acknowledges the prostrating act has a certain “natural expressiveness” but argues that its meaning is nevertheless “fixed by rule”. It could also be argued that that the natural expressiveness of prostration influences the rule.
The red traffic light signal can also be used to illustrate the fact that there is no clear cut distinction between arbitrary and non-arbitrary signifiers. In many traffic signal system codes, there is a rule or convention that determines that a red lights signal “stop”, green lights signal “go”, and amber lights signal “be careful”. The signals and meanings could have been associated differently. In another world, red might mean “caution”, green might mean “stop” and amber might mean “go”. At the same time, it could be argued that red is not a completely arbitrary signal for “stop”; that there is something natural about red signalling danger because it is the colour of fire, blood, and so on. Moreover, the colour red is easy for humans to see and to discriminate from other colours. In short, the choice of the colour red in the system of traffic signals is not completely arbitrary but to some degree constrained by the characteristics of sign users and their environment.

An implication of the preceding discussion is that psychology cannot be excluded from semiotics by claiming a purely arbitrary and conventional status for the rules of selection. The triadic nature of the sign and the continuum between conventional and natural signs mitigate the exclusion. The rules governing the operation of semiotic resources are subject to influence from extra-systemic reality. Approaches to semiotics that tacitly or explicitly exclude the semiotic subject, and/or the extra-semiotic relations of semiotic networks, are weaker as a result.

3.2.3. Neglect of the sign user

A language, Saussure tells us, “is a social institution” (p. 34) but it is not like other social institutions in that languages (and semiological systems in general) are beyond the control of both the individual and the collective will (p. 34). As Berger & Pullberg, note however, it is a matter of debate whether social institutions are in fact made by voluntary decision:
Sociological theories may be grouped around two poles. The first presents us with a view of society as a network of human meaning as embodiments of human activity. The second, on the other hand, presents us with society conceived of as a thing-like facticity, standing over against its individual members with coercive controls and moulding them in its socialising process. (1966, p. 56)

In Saussure’s work, semiotic systems do take on the character of a “thing-like facticity” constraining individual action. This is a characteristic that Saussurian structuralism shares with a diverse range of other approaches that could be labelled structuralist. In each case, structure is accorded primacy over action in its value as a descriptive and explanatory concept. Eco (1976) continued the structuralist tradition when he asserted the following:

A signification system is an autonomous semiotic construct that has an abstract mode of existence independent of any possible communicative act it makes possible. On the contrary . . . every act of communication to or between human beings—or any other intelligent biological or mechanical apparatus—presupposes a signification system as its necessary condition (p. 9).

One explanation for Eco’s claim is that he was so spellbound by the Saussurian structuralist position that he could not acknowledge the existence of code-free communication. After all, Eco was strongly influenced by Louis Hjelmslev, who distilled the more formalist aspects of structuralist thinking. Contrary to Eco’s assertion, some acts of semiosis are not dependent on signification systems. For example, a driver may place a tyre on the side of the road behind his car in order to signal that the car is broken down and stationary. In this case, the relationship between the signifier (tyre on the side of the road) and the signified state of affairs (broken down car) is not part of a convention or code. It may however become conventionalised and codified if there is mutual agreement such that placing a car tyre on the road is deemed to signify a mechanical breakdown. This example indicates that a concrete human action of signalling can form the basis of a communicative code, which is one kind of social structure. In subsequent transactions with the code, the code user is both influenced by and influences the structure of the code. The same reciprocal
influence between agency and structure is evident in all social institutions. Giddens (1984) calls this phenomenon the “duality of structure”. An examination of the concept of structure in sociology can shed more light on this phenomenon.

Within the field of sociological scholarship, structuralism describes an approach which putatively focuses on causal influences over human conduct and networks of social relations and positions without reference to the individual agent. The structural approach is further defined in opposition to the major alternative approach, “methodological individualism” (Giddens, 1984, p. 213), which focuses on action. Giddens examines some of the structural axioms put forward by a proponent of structural sociology, Peter M. Balu. Giddens summarises one of Blau’s propositions as follows:

An organisation’s increasing size produces greater internal differentiation and hence raises the proportion of administrative personnel it contains. According to him, this relationship can be grasped “without investigating the motives of individuals in organisations”. (1984, p. 211)

Giddens argues, to the contrary, that a causal explanation of this phenomenon is impossible without either positing or discovering motives, reasons and intentions of individual actors: “The increased proportion of administrators will tend to come about as actors respond to what they see to be new problems and issues which increased organisational size presents” (p. 212). Giddens argues that it is essential that we have an account originating in the actors’ point of view in order to determine whether the expansion of administrators is an intended or unintended consequence of their actions. It is in this sense that Giddens’ approach is one that emphasises the “duality of structure”:

What these comments demonstrate is that a “structural approach” to the social sciences cannot be severed from an examination of the mechanisms of social reproduction. It is perfectly correct, of course, to emphasise that society is not a creation of individual actors and that the structural properties of social systems endure beyond the lifetimes of individuals. But only in so far as there is continuity in social reproduction across time and space. And such continuity occurs through the reflexively monitored activities of situated actors, having a range of intended and unintended consequences . . .
there is no such thing as a distinctive category of “structural explanation” only an interpretation of the modes in which varying forms of constraint influence human action. pp. 212-213)

Giddens’ reference to “reflexively monitored activities of situated actors” refers to the fact that people are usually able to provide an account of the reasons why they do the things they do and such accounts may be informed by the kind of sociological theories and principles that are discussed here.

The tension between structural and action explanations in sociology helps us to understand the tension between the dimensions of langue and parole in semiotics. While structuralist semiotics foregrounds langue, or the abstract, institutional, constraining aspect of communication, it would also be possible to foreground parole, or the concrete reproduction of langue across time and space, to borrow Giddens’ phrase. Giddens’ goal is to demonstrate that a sounder approach is to focus on the interaction between action and structure. As Runciman (1970) noted, in a spirit foreshadowing Giddens’ (1984) concept of duality of structure,

It is true that there is a clear distinction between structure on the one side and both history and function on the other. But this does not by itself justify the escalation of a difference of emphasis into a clash of doctrines. Every structural explanation has implicit reference to origin and function. The rivalry between them is not between one theory and another but between one aspect and another of the particular theory employed. (p. 47)

In Giddens’ (1984) model langue and parole are interrelated, in that semiotic systems are maintained and evolve by means of their use. Lewis’ (1969) identification of a key dimension of convention as a “regularity in behaviour produced by a system of expectations” (p.118) is consistent with Giddens’ view in that it clearly links a social-structural concept with human action. In comparing his conceptualisation of convention with that of Shwayder’s conceptualisation of rule, Lewis (1969) notes that each of these concepts has an individual and communal aspect and that the difference between his and Shwayder’s position is no more than a difference in emphasis: “For Shwayder, a rule is a system of
expectations likely to produce regular behaviour. For me, a convention is a regularity in behaviour produced by a system of expectations. . . . But the difference is superficial” (p.118). Again, this is consistent with Giddens’ model of structuration where agency and structure are seen as two sides of the same coin. In contrast, structuralist thinkers conceptualise agency as diametrically opposed to structure and marginalise agency. For example, Eco (1976) accepts Lewis’ (1969) conceptualisation of convention, when he denies that a theory of codes has anything “to do with what may happen in the addressee’s mind” (p.83).

It could be argued that even if they are grounded in behaviour, many conventional semiotic codes are uninteresting psychologically because they are utilised in a standard or conventional manner—remaining stable over time and exhibiting few individual differences in their application. Systems of mathematical signs, for example, are relatively invariant and the concepts to which they refer are relatively impervious to individual nuances. Traffic signs are also relatively fixed in the meanings ascribed to them and the standard meanings of a traffic code. It could be argued that the traffic code can be investigated independently of its origins in human action, or its reproduction and evolution through the users’ interpretations and responses to the code.

We would risk missing important facets of semiotics, however, if we confined our analysis to the systemic aspect of semiotics and ignored the transactional aspect, even when it comes to an analysis of codes which may at first glance seem too fixed to be psychologically interesting. On closer examination, codes such as traffic signs provide considerable latitude for individual judgement. The amber traffic light, with the conventional meaning “proceed with caution,” allows the sign interpreter a degree of discretion to choose the level of caution with which to proceed. This built-in latitude is even more characteristic of roundabout intersections. Rules such as the following leave considerable room for driver discretion:

1. Slow down and prepare to give way as you approach the roundabout.
2. You must give way to traffic already on the roundabout if there is any risk of a collision.

3. Enter the roundabout when there is a safe gap in the traffic.

There is also at least one other unwritten but implied rule involved in negotiating roundabouts safely when vehicles break Rule 1:

4. You must give way to vehicles approaching the roundabout too quickly (vehicles that are breaking rule 1) as there is a risk collision.

The driver approaching a roundabout has to give way to vehicles already in the intersection. He or she also needs to make judgements about indeterminate situations where it is unclear whether a vehicle is approaching the intersection or actually in the intersection. There may also be situations when it is unclear whether a vehicle at the roundabout is about to stop or proceed through the intersection. The same complexities apply to semiotic systems in general. If semiotic systems conventionally sanction the use of judgment and interpretation, then the systemic and transactional aspects of semiotics exist in an inseparable or dialectical relationship. Consistent with Giddens’ concept of duality of structure, the potential for discretion can be regarded as “built in” to a semiotic resource or it can be regarded as characterising the sign user’s interpretive action.

The phenomenon of deviant interpretations also calls for a more comprehensive interdisciplinary approach, as there is a fine line between the semiotic concept of interpretative latitude and the psychosocial concept of deviance. A deviant interpretation is one where the sign user deliberately goes beyond the level of interpretive discretion permitted by semiotic conventions. For example, it has been observed that an amber traffic light is more likely to evoke the interpretation “speed up and cross the intersection before it turns red” in a young male driver than in an older driver. In order to understand the speeding young male driver we need to understand his beliefs and desires, the traffic code and other social and cultural conventions which form the context of his action. Hence, if we are interested in the process of semiosis, the origins of semiotic
resources, the motivations for deviant and non-deviant interpretations, and an account of the ways in which sign users exercise the discretion afforded by semiotic parameters, then psychology, and other sciences, are required.

The preceding examples illustrate that Giddens’ (1984) concept of the duality of structure can be used to address the marginalisation of human agency as conceptualised in Saussurian linguistics. Giddens offers a more powerful explanatory framework that goes beyond the bifurcation of social structure and action. Language, like most social institutions, exhibits “duality of structure” where human action and social constraint stand in a dialectical relationship. A limitation of Giddens’ approach is that it only considers action in relation to structure (Campbell, 1996). Hence while Giddens can capture the interaction between langue and parole, his model does not permit analysis of instances of communicative action that do not rely on langue. Several examples of communication not relying on any semiotic system have already been given.

### 3.3. FROM STRUCTURALISM TO FUNCTIONALISM

The functionalist positions of Bühler, Jakobson and Halliday are in some respects positive developments. In other respects they perpetuate the problems inherent in Saussure’s structuralist position. The foundational concepts developed in Chapter 1 of the present work provide a means for sorting the sound from the unsound aspects of functionalism in semiotics.

#### 3.3.1. Bühler’s language functions

Saussure’s *Course in General Linguistics* exerted its influence on German psychologist Karl Bühler (1879-1963) via Bühler’s participation in the Prague Linguistic Circle and by means of the 1931 German translation of the *Course*. Bühler in turn exerted a powerful influence on members of the Prague Linguistic Circle, including figures such as Roman Jakobson and Nikolai Trubetzkoy
(Koerner 1984). Bühler’s work was well received in Europe—notwithstanding his persecution by the Nazi regime.

Koerner (1984) speculated that the history of linguistics around the world could well have been different if Bühler’s work had been available earlier. Its emphasis on language functions had the potential to counter Saussure and Hjelmslev’s legacy, which involved an almost exclusive focus “on the ‘formal’ aspects of ‘grammar’, which excludes the speaker as well as the social conditioning of language, and neglects semantics, at least in the linguistic sense of the term” (p. 4).

Unfortunately, the corrective potential of Bühler’s work still has not been fully realised. Roman Jakobson regarded Bühler’s Sprachtheorie as the greatest contribution to linguists seeking to understand the psychology of language. It is therefore ironic that Bühler remains one of the most neglected figures in the history of Anglo-American psychology. Bühler’s major works on language, which were published in German in the 1930s, did not appear in English until 1982. In contrast, Hjelmslev’s 1943 formalist classic, Prolegomena to a Theory of Language, was available in the United States by the 1950s (Koerner, 1984, Brock 1994). Koerner notes that Chomsky, another formalist, consulted Hjelmslev’s Prolegomena frequently as a source for his theory building.

Bühler elaborated on the idea that language and other sign systems are not just media for conveying information, but are also media for psychological expression and interpersonal action. This means that communicative acts simultaneously serve multiple purposes. They serve to 1) express the mental states of a speaker, 2) represent states of affairs and 3) address an audience (Bühler, 1933/1982, p. 153). Every sign has three dimensions:

It is a symbol by reason of its being coordinated to objects and states of affairs; an index (indicium) by reason of its dependence on the sender, whose interiority it expresses; and a signal by reason of its appeal to the hearer, whose outer and inner behaviour it directs just as other traffic signs do. (Bühler, 1933/1982, p. 164)
As is indicated in Figure 5, Bühler’s approach is consistent with the triadic approach to semiosis whereby a sender uses a sign (S) to represent states of affairs, speaker-related psychological states, and audience-directed goals. The complementary triadic relationship holds from the receiver’s point of view. The receiver uses a signifier to infer and decode states of affairs, and speaker-related psychological states.

**Figure 5: Bühler’s sign functions**

All three functions are present in a communicative act but one function usually dominates. For example, if Jane is hammering a nail, accidentally hits her thumb, and yells, “Oh damn!” that is a clear example where the expressive use of language, or the expressive function, dominates. But the other functions are still involved. As well as expressing a state of pain and frustration by means of this utterance, she may also be referring to what just happened (to a state of affairs or event) and she may be appealing to her audience for sympathy.

According to Bühler, the circle in the middle the figure symbolises “the concrete sound phenomenon” (1933/1982, p.164), while the triangle represents
the application of the sound phenomenon in the construction of resources for signification. Signification resources are in turn used in the communication between sender and receiver. Bühler (1934/1990) expanded on Saussure’s distinction between parole and langue by distinguishing two aspects of semiotic actions and two aspects of semiotic products. At a concrete level Bühler distinguished between the individual speech actions and their effect on the receiver, which he called language works. This is analogous to Austin’s (1962) distinction between an illocutionary act and a perlocutionary act (Ducrot & Todorov 1979). An illocutionary act (or speech action), such as apologising, is within the control of the individual whereas a perlocution (or language work), such as the audience’s acceptance or rejection of the apology, is not within the individual’s control; it represents an intersubjective phenomenon.

At a more abstract level, Bühler distinguished between speech acts and language structures. While structures are a reflection of the linguistic resources available to the individual, speech acts reflect the functional dissection of signification resources along the lines of the expressive, representational and appeal dimensions of signification. For Bühler, speech acts are “inherent in the act of communication itself, independently of the speaker’s other intentions and projects” (Ducrot and Todorov, 1979, p. 341). Bühler’s schema is outlined in the following table:
Table 9: Bühler’s conception of semiotics

<table>
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<tr>
<th>LEVEL OF FORMALISATION</th>
<th>PHENOMENON</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>INDIVIDUAL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LOW</td>
<td>Concrete speech actions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HIGH</td>
<td>Speech acts</td>
</tr>
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</table>

Ducrot and Todorov argue that Bühler’s schematisation represented his attempt to distinguish “what is inherent and what is extrinsic in linguistic activity” (p.339). It is questionable, however, to what extent such a distinction can be made. For one thing, there can be no bifurcation between the individual and collective aspects of semiotic systems since the collective aspect of semiotic phenomena is built on the contribution of individual acts of meaning-making. Similarly speech acts and language structures represent a “higher level of formalisation” (Bühler, 1934/1990, p. 58) of concrete speech actions and language works rather than distinct categories. The dialectical relationship between action and structure is illustrated in the following quote from Humboldt (1836), one of the sources for Bühler’s schema:

The two mutually opposing viewpoints, one which sees language as alien and the other which sees it pertaining to the soul, one which sees language as independent of the soul and the other which sees it dependent upon it, are really combined in language and constitute the idiosyncrasy of its nature. This conflict of ideas, moreover, must not be solved so that language becomes in part alien and independent and in part neither. Language is objectively reactive and independent precisely to the extent that it is subjectively reacted upon and dependent (Humboldt 1836, quoted in Ives, 1997, p.90).
In spite of Bühler’s over-taxonomisation of concepts associated with the action-structure dialectic that Humboldt refers to, Bühler’s work represents an advance on the work of Saussure in that he placed greater emphasis on action. Roman Jakobson expanded on Bühler’s concept of language functions. Jakobson’s work, like Bühler’s, illustrates a strong structuralist and formalist tendency which is inherited from Saussure. This poses an obstacle to the establishment of the interdisciplinary formulation that is required for the comprehensive understanding of semiosis.

3.3.2. Jakobson’s functionalism

Saussure employed a series of dichotomies, marginalising one side of each dichotomy in order to define and delimit linguistics in relation to other disciplines. Thus non-linguistic semiotic systems were marginalised in favour of language, the functional aspect of language was marginalised in favour of the structural, and the historical aspect of language was marginalised in favour of the synchronic. Saussure thus hermetically sealed linguistics and semiotics from the interdisciplinary impulse. Figures such as Bühler and Jakobson were nevertheless able to draw themselves away from Saussure’s shadow to some extent. The concept of structure, however, continued to exert a powerful attraction. According to Steiner (1978), Jakobson himself coined the term structuralism in 1929, while he was vice-chairman of the Prague Linguistic Circle. But Jakobson was led to the interdisciplinary nature of the study of language via the concepts of function and communication. In Jakobson’s view, “the verbal structure of a message . . . depends primarily on the predominant function” (1960, p. 351). The predominant function is in turn correlated with the element of the communication that is emphasised or foregrounded. The relationship between the foregrounding of elements of communication and language functions is summarised in Table 10.
Table 10: Jakobson’s taxonomy of language functions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Element of communication foregrounded</th>
<th>Dominant function</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Addresser (speaker, sender)</td>
<td>Emotive (e.g., interjections)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Context (referent, signified)</td>
<td>Referential (e.g., scientific discourse)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Message (<em>parole</em>)</td>
<td>Poetic (e.g., literature)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contact (physical channel and psychological bond)</td>
<td>Phatic (e.g., small talk, ‘baby talk’)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Code (language system, <em>langue</em>)</td>
<td>Metalingual (e.g., dictionary definitions of words)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Addressee (hearer, receiver)</td>
<td>Conative (e.g., imperatives)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Thus, Jakobson added three further language functions to Bühler’s model. Jakobson regarded any narrowing of investigation on particular elements of language as legitimate only if it is not accompanied by a “degradation of all the other facets of language as supposedly residual, second-rate linguistic questions, and, especially any attempt to expel these topics from linguistics proper” (1973, p. 37). Jakobson wrote of the “indissoluble dialectic unity of *langue* and *parole* (code/message, competence/performance)” (p. 37). He argued that Saussure made an important contribution in focussing on a set of antinomies but that it was subsequently important to synthesise them (p. 19). Jakobson made it clear that in his mind, the separation of *langue* and *parole* amounts to no more than a “recognition of two different hierarchic relations: an analysis of the code with due regard for the message; and *vice versa*” (p. 20). Similarly, Jakobson and Hale (1956) noted that “the constituents of any message are necessarily linked with the code by an internal relation and with the message by an external relation” (pp. 61-62). Internal relations are relations of similarity, i.e., relations between synonyms and antonyms, while external relations are relations of contiguity or causality in states of affairs. While the recognition of the role of parole is a step in the right
direction, functionalist authors have failed to take the next step which involves the recognition that there is more to parole than its relationship with langue. Uses of semiotic resources regularly escape the boundaries or potential afforded by semiotic resources. This is because language use is governed by psychological as well as conventional and social-contextual factors.

In spite of Jakobson’s interest in language functions and communication, he remained to a large extent a structuralist and this limited his interdisciplinary vision. This is evident in his account of the poetic function of language. As Coupland (2007) notes, Jakobson “gives us no hint that style has an interactional dimension or that style needs to be interpreted actively by listeners/readers” (p.11). The limitations of the functionalist trend in linguistics become further apparent upon examination of the work of Michael Halliday, who lists Jakobson and other functionalists as an important influence.

3.3.3. Halliday’s conception of function

In describing their systemic-functional approach to linguistics, Halliday & Hasan (1986) cite the writings of various functional-minded thinkers. These include an anthropologist (Malinowski 1923), psychologist (Bühler, 1934) ethologist (Morris 1967), and an educationist, James Britton. Britton (1979, for example, noted three functions or purposes of students’ writing: expressive, transactional and poetic. In spite of Halliday’s influences, there is little that is psychological in Halliday’s approach. While contemporary versions of semiotics influenced by Halliday have emphasised the use of conventional systems in social context, semiotics continues to exhibit a dearth of investigation into psychological aspects of semiosis. While psychological aspects of semiosis are particularly salient in instances of convention-free semiosis, psychological variables are to some extent present in all uses of conventional codes.

Halliday’s approach is described as “systemic-functionalist” in that his interest in the language functions is focused on functions that are reflected in,
realised by, or potentiated by, the structures or systems of language. In other words, the functions which are to be short-listed as fundamental or superordinate are those towards which the grammar of a language is oriented. Hence it might be appropriate to construe Halliday’s approach as a hybrid of the structuralist and functionalist schools. For Halliday, function is synonymous with use in the sense that:

The production and consumption of texts functions to satisfy human needs. The use of language shapes the system of language, and for this reason the organisation of language is not arbitrary but motivated by those needs. (1985, p. xiii)

Human needs and purposes are manifested in the language system as “fundamental components of meaning” (xiii) or *metafunctions*. Metafunctions are the imprint that the use of language has left upon the semantic organisation of language. Two general human purposes—to understand the environment and to act on others—are manifested in the language system by the ideational and interpersonal metafunctions, respectively. The third metafunction, the textual metafunction, is instrumental for the other two in that it provides grammatical resources for the ideational and interpersonal metafunctions (p. xiv).

Halliday and Hasan (1986) distinguish their functionalism from that of Bühler, Malinowski, Britton, Jakobson, and Desmond Morris. Each of these theorists, they argue, interprets language use from a conceptual grid constructed outside of language (pp. 16-17). In the Hallidayan approach, function is “interpreted not just as the use of language but as a fundamental property of language itself” (p. 17).

But functions cannot literally be properties. The functions of language specify interactions or relationships, which in the realist view, cannot be reduced to properties of the things interacting. Consider the following analogical argument. Assume (as Plato and Bühler did) that language is a tool. One of the functions of this tool is to enable a communicator to inform an audience about a particular fact, just as a hammer is a tool which enables a carpenter to drive nails
into wood. The hammer, the wood, the nails, and the carpenter are all equally part of the functional description. The function specifies an interaction between the tool and the other elements. This interaction cannot be interpreted as a property of the hammer.

If Halliday is attempting a synthesis of structural and functional approaches, as he claims (1970, p. 141), the synthesis cannot be carried out by reducing function to structure as is implied by the concept of functional properties. Rather, functions have to be specified in relational terms that take into account the properties of the three elements of sign relationships: sign users, the systemic aspect of signifiers, and states of affairs. Halliday rightly rejects an approach that focuses too heavily on the language user:

We cannot explain language by simply listing its uses, and such a list could in any case be prolonged indefinitely. Malinowski’s ethnographic account of the functions of language based on the distinction between “pragmatic” and “magical”, or Bühler’s well-known tripartite division . . . show that it is possible to generalise, but these generalisations are directed towards sociological or psychological inquiries, and are not intended primarily to throw light on the nature of linguistic structure. (Halliday, 1970, p. 141)

While he criticises Bühler’s approach, for not being grounded in grammar, he does acknowledge that Bühler’s expressive, appeal, and representational functions are realised in grammar by the categories of first, second, and third person respectively. Provided that semiotic theories acknowledge the logical constraints of the triadic nature of semiosis, then some theories could emphasise the structural aspect of language while others could emphasise the use aspects. However these differences in emphasis must not be elevated into metaphysical doctrines that transgress basic logical principles, such as the need for a clear distinction between sign elements and the relations in which they stand.

If structuralism and functionalism are conceived as a methodological continuum, then Halliday’s theory is closer to the structural than the functional end of the continuum. The main corpus of his work reflects the following orientation:
It is fairly obvious that language is used to serve a variety of different needs, but until we examine its grammar there is no clear reason for classifying its uses in any particular way. However, when we examine the meaning potential of language itself, we find that the vast numbers of options embodied in it combine into a very few independent ‘‘networks’’; and those networks of options correspond to certain basic functions of language. (1970, p. 142)

Halliday suggests that language structures can be used as a basis for taxonomising language functions. The structures in which he is primarily interested are clusters or sets of meaning options. However, Halliday seems to wish to look at language from outside as well as the inside:

An account of linguistic structure that pays no attention to the demands that we make of language is lacking in perspicacity, since it offers no principles for explaining why the structure of language is organised in one way rather than another. (1970, p. 141)

Halliday thus articulates incompatible goals. He wants to use language structures as a foundation for discovering language functions, but he also wants to use language functions as a guide for discovering salient structures: “only through the study of language in use are all the functions of language and therefore all components of meaning brought into focus”. (p. 145)

While Halliday criticises use-guided classifications of language functions, his advocacy of a system-guided classification of functions is just as problematic. It is like claiming that we can get a classification of the functions of a hammer by basing that classification on its design. When we examine a hammer we find a structure on one side of the hammer designed to hammer nails and a structure on the other side of the hammer designed to pull nails out. Hence we are left with two function categories. This is a neat strategy to arrive at functions, but it is too neat. Hammers can be, and are, used for a multitude of purposes for which they are not specifically designed. They can, for example, be used as a jack to prise wooden floor boards from the grid to which they are nailed. The structure of a hammer gives us only the barest clues about these various uses, and the function that
corresponds to each structure is a contingent matter which can only be inferred from an examination of structures in use. This involves reference to the characteristics of the user, the sign system and the context. The functional taxonomisation of structure is dependent on some background knowledge of use. We seem to be able to identify a hammer’s two primary functions (hammering and nail pulling) from its structure alone, but this is an illusion. We only know the functions of the hammer because we have seen it, directly or indirectly, in use.

The illusion that we can deduce function from structure can be exposed by attempting to work out the function of a tool with which we are less familiar, one we have not observed functioning. Figure 6, for example, illustrates the structure of a tool fairly transparently, but this illustration provides scant information to base inferences about the actual uses or typical functions of the tool.

**Figure 6: A tool with a tricurvular structure**

When the same tool is illustrated in relation to the user (Figure 7), we are afforded more clues as to its potential functions. We are now able to infer, for example, that the tool is a hand tool and that a spiked side is perhaps directed to some aspect of the environment.
The functions or uses of a particular tool can only be known when it is actually observed in use. Figure 8 illustrates the structure of the tool in a particular context. Here the range of possible inferences about the tool is narrowed because its range of potential transactions with other objects is more clearly manifest and contextual or background knowledge, about musical instruments in this case, can be more readily brought to bear on understanding the tool. For example, we are likely to infer that this tricurvular object is a plectrum or guitar pick, which is used to pluck the guitar strings, rather than to point to them or cut them.
Without observing a particular tool in relation to the user and potential target of action (as in Figure 8), we may not even know that it is a tool and we cannot readily deduce its typical function from its structure.

There is a strong parallel between language use and tool use in general. Tool use involves the agent using an instrument to perform an action intentionally directed at a target of the action. In the case of an instance of language use, such as asking a direct question, the agent typically uses an instrument called an interrogative clause, such as “Where is Jane?”. In this case, the target of the action is the person or audience from whom the information about Jane is requested. The fact that structure does not determine function is illustrated by the case of rhetorical questions, where there must be an inference of the communicator’s intention from contextual factors for the question to be understood. Consider the following description of a possible context of the question “Where is Jane?”

Jane is a company board member. She missed a board meeting where an important vote on the future of the company was being cast. One of the board members present asks the question (with or without a slightly ironic tone of voice) after the vote had been cast.

In such a case, it is unlikely that the person asking the question is expecting an answer. The person is more likely making an elliptical comment indicating that Jane’s absence, when there is important business to be conducted, is notable.

While Halliday aims to strike a balance between a systemic, or structural, and functional focus, he leans towards the structural. Like Saussure, Halliday was aiming to do more than study linguistic phenomena. He was also aiming to shore up the boundaries of linguistics as a discipline. Saussure wanted to “define and delimit” the study of language so that it stands apart from other fields, but Halliday saw this was counterproductive. He therefore wants to loosen (but not demolish) the boundaries around linguistics, and he achieves this by loosening (but not demolishing) the boundaries around language. Thus, in Halliday’s view
Linguistics needs to be autonomous if it is to be relevant to other fields of study: the particulars of language are explained by reference to a general account of language, not by being related piecemeal to social or other non-linguistic phenomena. But this ‘autonomy’ is conditional and temporary; in the last analysis we cannot isolate the subject within its own boundaries, and when we come to decide what features in language are to be ignored as unsystematic we are bound to invoke considerations from outside language itself (1973, p. 53).

Halliday adds that if an external point of departure for the study of language is needed, there is no need to insist that it be any one particular point of departure, and that sociology is just as suitable for this purpose as psychology (1973, p. 54). Halliday seems to be aware that while it may be useful to keep language methodologically separate from other disciplines for the purpose of academic investigation, the divisions amongst the various academic disciplines are not absolute. Hence if the discipline of linguistics can be methodologically separated from other disciplines such as sociology and psychology, it does not follow that the phenomenon of language itself can be so separated.

While Halliday accepts the social dimension of language, he chooses to ignore the psychological implications that emerge from a conceptualisation of language as a phenomenon with the process of semiosis at its core. The triadic nature of semiosis implies that language is more than just a social phenomenon; it is also a type of action that can be studied from psychological, social, and social-psychological points of view, amongst others. Moreover, semiosis can be studied at various levels of abstraction, from individual communicative behaviour, or language in use, to collective code systems. Since the functional analysis in functional-systemic linguistics is largely conducted from the point of view of semiotic resources and contextual features of the social situation, the conceptualisation of semiosis as a human action is marginalised. Concomitant with this marginalisation is a limited role for the sign user and the discipline of psychology.
The marginalisation of the sign user can be illustrated by means of Eggins’ (2004) summary of systemic-functional linguistics. Eggins’ analysis implies two senses of linguistic choices, a systemic sense focusing on semiotic resources and a transactional/psychological sense focusing on the use of those resources in the process of meaning-making:

Language is structured to make three main kinds of meanings simultaneously. This semantic complexity, which allows ideational, interpersonal, and textual meanings to be fused together in linguistic units, is possible because language is a conventionalised coding system, organised as sets of choices…. This semiotic interpretation of the system of language allows us to consider the appropriateness or inappropriateness of different linguistic choices in relation to their contexts of use. (Eggins, 2004, p. 3)

While Eggins speaks of “sets of choices” it is more precise to say that semiotic systems provide options or alternatives available to communicators and established by convention. These alternatives enable semiotic agents to exercise choices. While options reflect the systemic aspect of semiotics, choices reflect the transactional or communicative aspect of semiotics. Systemic-functional linguists however, are only interested in action from the perspective of the conventional coding system, in terms of the conventional appropriateness and inappropriateness of the use of coding resources in various contexts. Little insight into the mind of the communicator is required in order to determine whether the communicator’s behaviour conforms to conventional rules or not.
CHAPTER 4: PSYCHOSEMIOactics

Thus far, the logical framework for the conceptualisation of semiotics outlined in Chapter 1 has been used to evaluate psychology and semiotics separately. This framework can also be used to evaluate existing conceptualisations of the *interface* of semiotics and psychology. The sound aspects of these conceptualisations can then be integrated with the aspects of psychology and semiotics that have survived critical scrutiny in Chapters 2 and 3.

4.1. Conceptualisations of the Interface

While semiosis has generally been neglected in psychology, several authors in addition to Michon, Jackson, Leiden & Jorna (2003) and Markel (1997) discussed above, have either used the term *psychosemiotics* or have explicitly conceptualised the interface between semiotics and psychology. The interdisciplinary project of psychosemiotics has been dismissed by Greimas and Courtes (1982) due to epistemological and methodological differences between the two fields. Cronkhite (1990) advocated a cognitive approach to signs and argued that it would be more productive to explore differences between the cognitive processing of arbitrary and non-arbitrary signs rather than using an approach based on the opposition between verbal versus non-verbal signs. Lang (1994) contrasted the classical approach to semiotics—where signs were regarded as a special class of object—with more advanced conceptualisations which acknowledged the relational nature of the sign. He identified three relational approaches: Peirce’s approach, focusing on sign effects; Saussure’s approach, which focused on the sign system; and Charles Morris’ approach, which focused on the use of signs in communication. Smith (2001) explicated the cultural dimension of semiosis. Reviewing these contributions in the light of the realist criteria established in the present work will help to illustrate the psychological foundations of semiosis.
4.1.1. Greimas and Courtes

Greimas and Courtes (1982) were pessimistic about the collaboration between the two disciplines in the psychosemiotic amalgam:

As for the relations between psychology and semiotics, they seem to be characterised, on both sides, by epistemological and methodological certitudes which only admit the integration (partial or total) of the neighbouring area in the other, without conceiving the possibility of a lasting collaboration. (p. 251)

Greimas and Courtes are correct to refer to the epistemological and methodological gulf between the quantitative-empirical tradition of psychology and semiotics. As was outlined in Chapter 2, while there are some areas of epistemological and methodological overlap between the qualitative-interpretative tradition of psychology and semiotics, it is only within a realist framework that these various currents and the contradictions between them can be reconciled. If a realist approach is taken to semiosis, collaboration with psychology is not only possible but required for a comprehensive account.

4.1.2. Cronkhite

Cronkhite (1990) defined psychosemiotics as the “study of the cognitive processing of signs” (p. 547). He argued for a perspective that allows for a continuum of sign arbitrariness, ranging from purely conventional signs to symptoms. Drawing upon the work of Liszka, he outlines the continuum of arbitrariness as follows:
Table 11: Cronkhite’s classification of signs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Degree of arbitrariness:</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Symptom</th>
<th>Semblance</th>
<th>Symbol</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ritual</td>
<td>Icon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thunder</td>
<td>Clenched</td>
<td>Two</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Storm</td>
<td>fist</td>
<td>raised</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Threat</td>
<td>fingers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Crescent</td>
<td>Moon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>shape</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Victory</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Cronkhite argued that this conceptual foundation is a good starting point to “identify the cognitive abilities necessary to process signs at various levels of arbitrariness” (p. 552). He posed the question of whether the mental processing of arbitrary sign relationships is different from the processing of natural sign relationships. He argued that psychological research has been framed around the distinction between verbal and non-verbal stimuli, whereas the more fundamental distinction is between the processing of arbitrary and natural signification. One research question that he posed was “Does right hemisphere activity simply decrease and left-hemisphere activity increase as signs become more symbolic, or is there a discontinuity, a sudden shift of activity from one hemisphere to the other?” (p. 578).

The interaction of indexical and arbitrary sign use is a fertile area for psychosemiotic investigation. Cronkhite makes a valid point in identifying signs which seem either to lie at various points on a continuum of arbitrariness or exhibit a mixture of naturalness and arbitrariness. While Cronkhite’s analysis is in the right general direction, there are two problems with his conceptualisation. Firstly, he does not make reference to mental concepts such as intention in his
characterisation. Secondly, the equivalence he draws between arbitrary and conventional signs is incorrect. An example can serve to illustrate these limitations. One night Jane, an insomniac, was lying in bed reading for a long time before she began to get sleepy. At that point she remembered that she needed to go to the bank the next day to deposit a cheque to cover the deposit on the flat that she and her husband had just bought. Jane’s first impulse was to write a note to herself. But since there was no pen by her bedside on that occasion, she was confronted with the dilemma of getting out of bed in order to write a note and risk interrupting the transition into sleep, or allow herself to go to sleep without writing a note and thereby risk forgetting to go to the bank. The compromise she arrived at was to throw her novel onto the middle of the floor, secure in the knowledge that she would notice it there in the morning, wonder what it was doing out of its usual place, and thereby be reminded that she had put it there to remind her of the task she had to attend to.

This example illustrates the use of a non-conventional symbol. When Jane used the position of the novel on the floor as a signifier to stand for the instruction to go to the bank, she was not drawing on any established convention. There is no social code that pairs a book lying on the floor with the instruction to go to the bank and deposit a cheque. While the semiotic relationship between the book, the instruction and Jane is not conventional, it is basically arbitrary. There are two interrelated aspects to this arbitrariness. These aspects of arbitrariness are interrelated because the both revolve around the mental processes of the sign user.

The first aspect of arbitrariness is the choice that Jane made from the range of alternative signifiers available to her. Anything Jane had in the room that could be left out of place could have served a similar role as the book on the floor. Jane’s choice of the book on the floor signifier was arbitrary to the extent that she had a range of potential signifiers available to her and to the extent that each of these potential signifiers was interchangeable (relative to her goals, intentions and preferences) in representing the signified. If she had a handkerchief, she could have tied a knot in it as a reminder to go to the bank. It is also true however, that
since the use of the book was the most convenient option for Jane, it was not a completely arbitrary choice. If Jane chooses a signifier because it feels convenient, then Jane’s choice cannot be fully explained without reference to her mental state.

The other aspect of arbitrariness is in the relationship between the signifier and the referent—often called the signified. In the above example, the signifier can be regarded as the book out of place on the floor and the signified is the instruction to go to the bank and deposit a cheque. This relationship is arbitrary because there is no intrinsic quality in the signifier (the out of place book) and the signified book (the reminder to make the bank deposit) that leads to their association. Their association is to some extent dependent on the intention of the signifying agent who created the association between the book and the reminder. An example of a somewhat less arbitrary reminder is Jane placing a cheque deposit slip on the floor instead of the book she was reading. The deposit slip has a tangible connection with the bank, both in Jane’s mind and irrespective of her thoughts on the matter. The deposit slip is therefore a less arbitrary choice than the novel she was reading.

Cronkhite’s reluctance to adopt the concept of intention or related mentalistic concepts in his discussion of semiotics leads to difficulties in clarifying the distinction between arbitrary and natural signs. It also creates difficulties in assessing the degree of arbitrariness in a particular sign. The use of a fist as a sign of threat can serve to illustrate this point. An analysis of the role of intentionality in the clenched fist sign in a range of contexts may lead to the various classifications of the sign. The closed fist may be:

1. An index if it is a reflex action with *no intention* involved on the part of the clencher, and is perceived by someone to represent the state of mind of the clencher,
2. A semblance, if it is *intended* to be perceived as threat gesture but there is *no intention* to carry out the threat,
3. A conventional icon if it is *used* in the same way as a standard warning sign such as the black and yellow symbol for a radiation hazard,

4. A conventional symbol, if the clenched fist is *used* in a communicative gesture and is part of a system of symbols such as a sign language.

Note that in each of the four examples, reference is made to the presence or absence of an intention or its corollary, a particular intentional *use* of the fist signifier. Even where the use involves reliance on a conventional resource, it should be remembered that that resource owes its existence to collective intentional action and each use of that resource involves the exercise of intention.

4.1.3. Lang

Alfred Lang’s (1994) article represents another attempt to outline the potential cross-fertilisation of semiotics and psychology. Lang argued that semiotics could offer psychology tools to analyse culture and that the collaboration of semiotics and psychology would be optimal when a Peircian perspective on signs was adopted. Lang identified the Peircian perspective as one of four perspectives on signs:

1. According to the classical perspective, represented by the Latin phrase *Aliquid pro aliquo* or “something standing for another thing”, signs are a special class of object. This formulation, Lang argues, is problematic because it is difficult to create a class of signs distinguished from non-signs.

2. The structuralist movement, beginning with Saussure and advanced by Roman Jakobson, Jurij Lotman and A.J. Greimas, focuses on meaning as constructed by distinctive features of a sign system.
3. A commonly accepted approach focuses on the function of signs in the communicative process. Lang identifies Charles Morris as the founder of this approach.

4. An approach originating in the writings of C.S. Peirce, involves the study of sign effects. Lang argues Peirce’s approach has the advantage of avoiding Cartesian dualism. In this approach signs create other signs in a potentially endless causal chain.

While Peirce rejected idealism, he was not a thoroughgoing materialist, as is illustrated in the following statement: “There is no thing which is in-itself in the sense of not being relative to the mind, though things which are relative to the mind doubtless are, apart from that relation” (1868/1991, pp. 81-82). This is a representationist position, a halfway position between materialism and the idealism associated with Cartesian dualism.

From the point of view of the argument of the present work, the major advantage of Peirce’s semiotics is that it represents a clear recognition of the triadic nature of signs. Peirce expressed this with simplicity when he stated that “a sign is something by knowing which we know something more” (1904/1953, p. 390). In more idiosyncratic language, Peirce noted that “If you take any ordinary triadic relation, you will always find a mental element in it. Brute action is secondness, any mentality involves thirdness” (1904/1953, p. 388). Firstness represents things in themselves while secondness concerns relationships between things. Thirdness can involve a phenomenon whereby a relationship is cognised. Peirce believed that one could say that a sign was a type of Third because a “sign brings a Second, its object, into cognitive relation to a Third” (1904/1953, p. 388). Although Peirce’s formulations of semiosis are full of psychological concepts such as cognition and consciousness, he avoided the psychological implications of semiosis. He stated that if concepts such as consciousness were to be incorporated into accounts of semiosis, this led to further questions that he would prefer not to discuss:
If we insist on consciousness, we must say what we mean by consciousness of an object. Shall we say we mean Feeling? Shall we say we mean association, or Habit? These are, on the face of them, psychological distinctions, which I am particular to avoid. (1904/1953, p. 398)

It is worth noting, however, that as much as he may have wanted to, Peirce could not avoid repeatedly using concepts such as habit and thought in his writings on semiotics.

4.1.4. Smith

Howard A. Smith (2001, 2005) also derives his model of semiotics from the works of Peirce. His approach is consistent with the realist critique of the quantitative-empirical tradition as discussed in Chapter 2 of the present work. Smith places psychosemiotics with cultural psychology rather than what he terms “mainstream causal psychology and models of information processing” (2005, p. 3). He emphasises that psychosemiotics represents a contextualist world view which includes the pragmatic aspect of signs; their use in “ever-changing physical and cultural environments” (2005, p. 4).

While Smith is correct to point to the limitations of the information processing metaphor, the mechanistic world view from which mainstream causal psychology originates still has much to offer. Markel’s work, for example, demonstrates that causality and cultural meaning need not stand in opposition. Smith argues that the mechanistic world view has led to a narrow focus in psychology on “inside-the-head cognitive products resulting from conscious, rational, and usually verbal phenomena that exclude emotion, bodily awareness, and other ways of knowing” (2005, pp. 3-4). Yet this is not necessarily a result of a mechanistic worldview per se. Rather, it is a result of an excessive focus on cognition at the expense of motivational constructs and a misguided anti-realist view of cognition as internal “representations” rather than brain-world relationships.
Smith adopts Howard Gardner’s theory of eight multiple intelligences as an antidote to the cognitive and verbal bias of mainstream psychological research. Within this model, the verbal is one of several “modes of representation” (2005, p. 8). Smith makes two modifications to Gardner’s model for the purpose of advancing the psychosemiotic enterprise. Both modifications are designed to recast the individualistic slant of Gardner’s theory in favour of the individual-social dialectic emphasised in Smith’s model of psychosemiotics. Firstly, Smith collapses Gardner’s concepts of interpersonal and intrapersonal intelligences into a category of “social-personal”. This leaves six additional intelligences: linguistic, musical, logico-mathematical, spatial, bodily-kinaesthetic and naturalistic. Secondly, Smith recasts these categories as “signways”, emphasising the engagement of the intelligences with cultural artefacts.

Smith’s move to combine the individual and social aspects of semiosis is an advance from formalist and structuralist approaches in that it at least acknowledges the individual in semiosis. It is also consistent with Giddens’ concept of the duality of structure discussed in the previous chapter. Like Giddens, Smith is precipitous in amalgamating social and individual phenomena. From the Andersonian realist perspective of the present work the interaction between any factors presupposes the independent existence of those factors. Hence, while it is plausible to empirically investigate the interaction of social and individual factors, the categories of social and individual cannot be conceptually amalgamated. Campbell (1996) has argued that contemporary social interactionist models fall into the trap of ignoring those aspects of individual action that do not have a social aspect. Acts of meaning-making that do not rely on conventional systems of signifiers fall into this category. Some examples discussed in the present work include placing a book on the floor as a reminder to oneself to go to the bank, placing a tyre on the road behind a stationary car to signal to other drivers that the car has broken down, and displaying a bottle of aspirin to communicate that one has a headache. In each of these cases, the act of semiosis operates, more or less, outside of semiotic conventions. A theory of social action or social interaction will be limited to the extent that it is not informed by sound
theory of individual action, for, as Campbell (1996) correctly points out, the category of action is fundamental to the category of social action.

There are several aspects of Smith’s approach which are in accord with the model of psychosemiotics presented here:

1. The emphasis on the multimodal nature of semiotics is in keeping with the critique of Saussurian language-centred semiotics.
2. The emphasis on context (in particular through reference to the work of Bakhtin), rather than abstract structures in the determination of meaning, is echoed here in the utilisation of positive developments in functional linguistics and pragmatics.
3. The notion of natural (biological and evolutionary) constraints on the semiotic process is also consistent with the realist and materialist framework of the present work.
4. Notwithstanding his amalgamation of individual and social aspects of semiosis, Smith emphasises a broad view of cognition and semiosis which encompasses emotional and motivational factors. This is in keeping with the emphasis in the present work on action and conation as key features of semiosis.

4.2. SUMMARY OF THE PSYCHOSEMIOTIC MODEL

The discussion so far yields the following principles, each of them supporting the argument that psychological concepts are integral to the understanding of semiosis and semiotics.

Semiosis involves an irreducible triadic relationship

A prototypical example of the semiotic triad is the case where a person uses a signifier to represent something. The person, the signifier, and state of affairs represented are essential components of semiosis (Petocz, 1999; 2004). While it is
methodologically possible to study sign systems separately from sign users and sign referents, such an approach is limited because characteristics of the sign user and other extra-systemic factors influence the organisation of sign systems.

**Sign use, or semiosis, is a type of action**

While Grice (1957) attempted to distinguish between intention-dependent and intention-independent meaning, closer examination reveals that all semiosis is a type of action and all action is intention-dependent. For example, the natural relationship between black clouds and rain is not in itself a semiotic relationship. Because all semiosis involves a triadic relationship, a black cloud only becomes an indexical signifier of potential rain if someone interprets it as such. A causal or natural relationship between a signifier and a signified is a necessary, but not sufficient, condition for semiosis.

The concept of intention as discussed by Grice also implies the concept of intentionality, as discussed by Brentano (1924/1995). The realist logical principles that govern the conceptualisation of semiotic phenomena also apply to the conceptualisation of mental phenomena. From the point of view of an Andersonian realist framework, all mental processes, including intention, have a relational nature. The phenomenon of action has a mental component and therefore also has a relational structure. Just as knowledge is always a relationship between the knower and the known, rather than a quality of the knower, so too, action is a relationship between an actor and the target of action, rather than a quality of movement.

While philosophers and folk psychologists make a distinction between thinking, feeling and action, these phenomena share the same relational structure with intentionality as their hallmark. The trifurcation of thinking, feeling and acting appears even more provisional when we reflect on the fact that actions, unlike reflex reactions, always involve thinking. It follows that the conatively-flavoured semiotic formula, consisting of \( x \) using \( y \) to achieve \( z \), belongs to the
same family as the cognitively-flavoured semiotic formula consisting of $x$ using $y$ to represent $z$. The conative focus of the psychosemiotic model developed in the present work helps to dismantle the bifurcations of action and structure on one hand and action and thought on the other.

The distinction between intentional, or goal-directed and deliberate action, and unintentional movements is a fundamental category in folk psychology (Malle, 2004). The concept of intention is also gaining greater attention in scientific psychology. Everyday examples illustrate that it is the intention rather than the observable behaviour that matters in social interaction. A simple action such as patting someone on the back could be an act of encouragement or a condescending act depending on the intention of the communicator. The acknowledgement of the actor’s subjective experience of voluntary control does not mean that the scientific principle of determinism is abandoned. In the present work, scientific determinism is regarded as compatible with the subjective experience that action is willed and deliberate. We can acknowledge that individuals *feel like* they are acting from choice, or have voluntary control, even though they do not. The feeling of having free will can in, principle, be given a causal explanation.

Semiotic systems can be causal fields for semiotic actions. Semiotic actions in turn shape semiotic fields

Giddens’ principle of the duality of social structure and action reminds us that each use of language is both constrained and enabled by conventions of language. The aspect of constraint is emphasised by structuralist models, while functionalist models pay greater attention to the enabling aspects of structures. Giddens also reminds us that semiotic structures can only be instantiated and re-instantiated by means of action. This suggests that an explanation of how an individual makes choices from the range of options afforded by semiotic resources requires a psychological explanation. Psychological concepts are also required to explain the origins of semiotic structures. Structures have arbitrary as well as non-
The word *gay*, for example, at one stage in the history of English, mainly signified an emotion. Later it came to signify an individual’s sexual preference for the same sex. More recently as a result of a change in the way that the word is used by younger generations, *gay* has taken on a pejorative meaning. McWilliams (1994) notes the “successive transformations of ‘inversion’ and ‘deviation’ to ‘homosexuality’ to being ‘gay’”. She also notes a recent development of a pejorative use of the word: “Recently I heard a nine-year-old girl disparage an idea because, she noted sneeringly, it was “too gay” (p. 2). In general, “any phenomenon that tends to trouble people, for whatever reason, seems to instigate … futile chasing after non-stigmatising language” (McWilliams, 1994, p.2). The Oxford English dictionary online (2000) includes an additional 2003 entry for *gay* as follows: “Slang (chiefly U.S.): Foolish, stupid, socially inappropriate or disapproved of; ‘lame’” (accessed 10 November 2007). This brief history of the word *gay* is a clear example of a change in language use preceding a change in a language convention.

It makes sense, therefore, to combine the analysis of the apparently divergent constructs of the arbitrary and conventional sign systems on the one hand, and causal psychological and sociological processes on the other. Anderson (1938/1962) recognised that the complex nature of causality required that causal processes be considered in context. Anderson’s approach can be explicated by reference to the apocryphal billiard ball illustration of causality. A billiard ball is hit by a cue stick which causes it to hit another billiard ball, which in turn sinks into a pocket. The sinking of the ball is the effect. In the case of billiards, various contextual factors influence the cause-effect relationship illustrated, including the skill of the player and the qualities of the table. For example, if the table is not level or one of the players is intoxicated with alcohol, the cause and effect relationship will be modified by these characteristics of the context. Analogously,
the causal processes involved in semiosis will be influenced by the social and cultural contexts in which they occur. In analysing the causal process, it is nevertheless important to take into consideration all three components of the causal process. In Saussurian semiotics, semiotic codes are overemphasised to the point where they become de facto causal determinants of semiosis. While contemporary models of semiotics emphasise the social context, they continue to ignore the psychological context.

Campbell (1996) demonstrated that microsociological approaches and interpretative social psychological approaches both overemphasised the social context as a causal factor. His analysis of “social situationism” reveals that explanations of the social aspect of action are consistently conflated with explanations of action itself. The qualitative-interpretative traditions of psychology and microsociology have a myopic emphasis on the social situation as the prime mover of human action. The social determination of action cannot be understood unless the characteristics of the individuals whose behaviour is being determined (the causal field) are understood. In other words, there can be no satisfactory account of action, including social action, without reference to the thoughts and motivations of the actor. Like social situationist approaches, semiotic approaches to the analysis of semiosis ignore individual characteristics. While approaches such as functionalist semiotics, social semiotics and ethnomethodology may excel in the analysis of the situational basis of meaning-making, this very strength becomes a weakness when the analysis of the social context, which is one aspect of semiosis, is substituted for a comprehensive explanation of semiotic phenomena.

The following table compares simplistic views of causality with sounder alternatives based on Anderson’s (1938) conceptualisation. This conceptualisation takes into account the context in which causes bring about effects.
**Table 12 : Limited *versus* comprehensive explanations**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Limited causal explanations</th>
<th>More comprehensive causal explanations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Physics</strong></td>
<td><strong>Physics</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The moving white snooker ball (<em>cause</em>) hits the red snooker ball which thereby rolls and sinks into the left side pocket (<em>effect</em>)</td>
<td>The white snooker ball (<em>cause</em>) hits the red snooker ball which thereby rolls into a side pocket (<em>effect</em>). The white ball hits the red ball hard enough to overcome the slight “up hill” slope of the table (<em>causal field</em>). The size and weight of the coloured balls (<em>causal field</em>) will influence how fast and how far they roll (<em>effect</em>) when they are hit by the white ball (<em>cause</em>)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Structuralist semiotics</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Systems of signifiers (<em>cause</em>) determine individuals’ interpretations (<em>effect</em>).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Systemic-functionalist semiotics</strong></td>
<td>Explanations combining a psychosocial approach with semiotics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Systems of signifiers need to be analysed according to the functional resources (<em>causal field</em>) that they offer the communicator. These resources facilitate three types of goals (<em>effect</em>): 1) Interpersonal, 2) Ideational, and 3) Textual cohesion.</td>
<td>There are three components to semiosis: the signifying agent, the signifier (or system of signifiers) and the signified. These components interact in complex ways. Semiosis is a causal process whereby <em>x</em> uses <em>y</em> to represent <em>z</em>, or <em>a</em> interprets <em>b</em> as representing <em>c</em>. Just as the causal field influences the cause effect relationship between signifying agent and signified, the causal relationship between signifier and signified influences the shape of the causal context. On the one hand, the system of signifiers enables and constrains semiosis. On the other hand, it is created, reproduced and shaped by acts of semiosis. In summary, systems of signifiers and other cultural and situational conventions are the resources (<em>causal context</em>) for communicative interaction (<em>cause and effect</em>) in particular contexts (<em>causal field</em>).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Post-modern” qualitative psychology &amp; “social situationism” (cf. Campbell 1996)</td>
<td>The conventions of the social situation (<em>cause</em>) determine individuals’ interpretations (<em>effect</em>).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The arbitrariness of signs is a matter of degree and cannot be explicated outside of a triadic conceptualisation of signs

In order to assess the degree to which sign relationships are arbitrary, we need to know whether it is the relationship between the signifier and the signified that is arbitrary, or whether the arbitrariness is in the relationship between the sign user and the signifier, or both. In the case of exclamations, such as ouch, the communicator’s options are more circumscribed compared to, say, poetic expressions. Since every utterance has an expressive or symptomatic dimension, the arbitrariness of a sign is always a matter of degree.

Only a triadic conceptualisation of the sign allows for an analysis of the extrasystemic factors which are the source of non-arbitrary sign relationships. In particular, the characteristics of individuals who use signifiers routinely influence the way in which systems of signifiers are structured. For example, the choice of a red light as a signal for the command to stop is influenced by extra-systemic aspects of the colour red. This colour has a natural association with dangerous aspects of the environment, such as fire, and it can easily be discriminated by the human eye. Iconic and indexical sign relationships provide a further illustration of the influence of extra-systemic factors. As Peirce noted, indexical signifiers are linked to the things that they signify by means of a causal or contiguous relationship, and iconic signifiers are connected to their signifieds by means of a mimetic relationship.

A realist approach, which acknowledges the qualitative nature of semiosis, is the optimal approach for the study of semiosis

The realist model of the interface between psychology and semiotics developed in the present work can be contrasted with the quantitative-empirical tradition of psychology. The realist model is built on the principles of
methodological pluralism and recognition of the distinction between qualitative and quantitative phenomena (Michell, 2004). In contrast, the quantitative-empirical tradition is closely aligned with an instrumentalist philosophy of science and a quantitative operationalist methodology. Semiotic phenomena are marginalised in this tradition because they cannot be easily moulded to fit into the quantitative framework. Unfortunately, the other major tradition in psychology, the qualitative-interpretive approach, is also problematic in that it is dominated by anti-scientific idealist, relativist and social constructionist philosophies. Similar problems abound in semiotics.

The realist criteria for the conceptualisation of semiosis, action and intentionality allow the broad positioning of psychosemiotics in relation to its source disciplines, psychology and semiotics. An outline of this position is presented in Table 13 below:
Table 13: Comparison of the received models of psychology and semiotics with psychosemiotics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Primary focus of research</th>
<th>Psychology</th>
<th>Semiotics</th>
<th>Psychosemiotics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cognition &amp; behaviour</td>
<td>Sign systems</td>
<td><strong>Semiosis, or sign use.</strong> Sign use needs to be conceptualised as intentional action rather than narrowly operationalised as observable behaviour or in terms of the information processing metaphor. Sign systems shape sign use and sign use shapes sign systems.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Nature of basic phenomena of interest | Causal | Conventional & interpretative | **Causal, conventional, & interpretative.** From a realist perspective, cause and effect relationships occur in a field or context (Anderson, 1938/1962; McMullen, 1996). Therefore meaning and communicative phenomena can be studied as cause-effect relationships. These causal processes occur in a field or **causal context.** Key aspects of the causal context are cultural factors such as conventional systems of signifiers and social factors such as the context of communication. |


| Methodology | Mostly quantitative | Mostly qualitative | **Quantitative or qualitative** methods are appropriate in psychosemiotics. The methodology should be appropriate to the nature of the phenomena (Michell, 2001, 2004) rather than be imposed by the *a priori* ideological leanings of the researcher. |

| Method | Experimental or correlational research | Descriptive analyses of conventional semiotic systems | **Empirical realism.** In the model of semiotics proposed here, empirical methods are broadly conceived and encompass experimental research, correlational research, logical analysis, and descriptive analysis. |
The preceding analysis summarises how psychosemiotic principles are distilled from a realist conceptualisation of semiosis. These principles represent a realisation of the interdisciplinary implications of the triadic nature of semiosis. The next section illustrates the application of the principles of psychosemiotics with a more detailed analysis of selected psychosocial phenomena.
CHAPTER 5: APPLICATIONS OF THE MODEL

Three diverse analyses of individual and social psychology are chosen to illustrate the model of psychosemiotics developed in the present work. The first analysis consists of an examination of the concept ethnic stereotyping. A psychosemiotic approach builds on less sophisticated approaches to ethnic stereotyping which do not take into account the functional and therefore motivational dimension of stereotyping as it is manifested in language and communication.

The second illustration demonstrates how the psychosemiotic model developed here can productively engage with ethnomethodological research. The limitations of an ethnomethodological analysis of the social interactions at an Alcoholics Anonymous meeting (O’Halloran 2003) are discussed and a psychosemiotic re-analysis is presented.

The final illustration of the psychosemiotic model developed in the present work is by means of an analysis of the cultural aspects of gambling. The psychosemiotic approach helps to explain how cultural symbolic resources mediate conflicts about gambling within the individual and in culture.

5.1. ETHNIC STEREOTYPING & ETHNOCENTRISM

A number of the arguments in the present work can be illustrated by examining the phenomenon of ethnic stereotyping. Eco (1976) argues that “semiotics is in principle the discipline studying everything that can be used in order to lie” (p. 7). Hence semiotics is relevant to the investigation of stereotypes, which can be used to lie about, or misrepresent, real states of affairs.

Semiotics makes a valuable contribution to the investigation of stereotypes in that it guides us to look beyond the manifest content of stereotyping. Semiotics allows for an analysis of formal textual relationships that can sustain stereotypes. The analysis of stereotypes will always be incomplete without the concepts of
*action* and *intention* emphasised in the present work. A review of several analyses of stereotyping reveals that the meaning of stereotypes is ambiguous or indeterminate without some sense of the mental processes of the communicator or the audience’s attributions about the communicator’s mental states.

### 5.1.1. The content of stereotypes

A limited approach to stereotypes is to define them in terms of their content. Three aspects of the content of stereotypes that regularly receive attention are their overgeneralisation, lack of accuracy, and their evaluative connotative meaning. For example Cohen (1990) defines a stereotype as a process by which someone from a particular group is attributed supposed characteristics of that group, irrespective of what the individual is like. Stereotypes are generally nasty and reinforce prejudice. For example, Jews are rich and stingy; blacks are stupid. They can flatter too. Jews are clever; blacks are sexual athletes. (p. 213)

Cohen’s reference to stereotypes which flatter suggests that it is not the content of stereotypes that matters but their social application. Whether a stereotype is positive negative, neutral, overgeneralising, or realistic may be less important than the *function* of the stereotype in sustaining prejudicial feelings and discriminatory social practices. If we regard the function of stereotypes as their defining characteristics, then a statement such as “blacks are sexual athletes” may or may not be an instance of stereotyping. It would depend on the psychological and social context of the utterance, and in particular, on the goals of the speaker.

In spite of the plausibility of the proposition that it is the *functions* of stereotypes in social domination that is their distinctive feature, United States psychologists, in particular, have focused on the negative *content* of stereotypes:

The stereotype has been variously defined as a “rigid impression, conforming very little to the facts” . . . or an “inaccurate, irrational overgeneralisation” . . . or as “unjustified” perceptions. . . . Psychologists condemn the process of stereotyping for both intellectual and moral reasons.
Intellectually, they believe that stereotyping is an inferior cognitive process that involves overgeneralisation and overcategorization. Morally, they believe that stereotyping involves lumping members of a group together when members of that group don’t want to be characterised as all the same. (Taylor and Porter, 1994, p. 86)

According to Taylor and Porter, European and Canadian psychologists, tend to view stereotyping as a normal process and challenge the stereotype that all stereotypes are negative. It can be argued that stereotypes are not necessarily negative because:

1) Social groups positively stereotype themselves. For example, there is the Australian stereotype of the bronzed, or suntanned, Aussie.

2) Social groups positively stereotype other groups. An example of this is the Australian stereotype of the technologically savvy German.

3) Stereotypes help to simplify complex information about social groups. Simplification in itself can be considered value-neutral.

According to one explanation, stereotyping is a biologically-based way of processing social information:

Much research on human cognitive processes such as memory and problem-solving shows that organizing elements by category or other salient characteristics is simply a fact we cannot alter any more than we can alter skin color or eye color. However, if outgroups were seen to be relatively homogeneous in comparison to one’s in-group, it would not be as deleterious if it was perceived as homogeneous along positively valued dimensions rather than negative ones. (Taylor and Porter, 1994, p. 89)

While we have a biological basis to stereotyping analogous to the biological basis for optical illusions, we also have the flexibility in the way we adjust to our innate biases of perception. In the same way that most people have ceased to be susceptible to the illusion that the earth is flat, it is possible for people to override their biologically-based bias to perceive out-group members in the de-individualised and negative light that legitimates the subordination of out-groups. Structuralist semiotics can also be used to illustrate the limitations of content-focused approaches to stereotypes.
5.1.2. Stereotypes and semiotics

Tools provided by structuralist semiotics allow us to analyse the *structure*, rather than just the *content* of texts. This allows for a more subtle investigation of stereotyping as it manifests itself by means of texts. For example, in the following extract from a communication textbook, there is no ethnocentrism in the conceptual content. The grammatical form of the message, however, suggests an ethnocentric perspective.

The great challenge, particularly as Australia becomes an increasingly multicultural society, is to try to get into the skin of the other person in a conflict. This is never easy. Some people argue that it is impossible to understand fully how other people act. Certainly when you’re dealing with a person with very different cultural assumptions, for example, a Vietnamese Buddhist or Turkish Muslim, you must be patient and you must try to understand their particular point of view. (Elder, 1994, p. 97)

While the content of this extract reflects a pluralist attitude to ethnicity in Australia, the form of the message suggests ethnocentrism. Vietnamese Buddhists or Turkish Muslims are grammatically positioned as the Other. They are not included in the reference to the reader, who is referred to as “you”.

The functionalist approaches to semiotics that evolved from structuralist approaches came with a greater recognition of the interpersonal dimension of meaning in addition to the ideational aspect. There was also a greater recognition of the relationships between formal elements of texts and social and cultural factors. The concept of genre, for example, facilitates an articulation of culturally specific conventional formulas for achieving broad communicative goals. The overgeneralising and dramatic style of the following text marks it as a comedic personality-focused interview, rather than a serious issue-focused interview. It is also significant that the interviewee, Oliviero Toscani, an advertising creative director, is commenting about his own nationality:
“Italy’s a country of thieves”, he says, “because for centuries Italians have been at the service of conquerors—Spaniards, Austrians, French, the Pope. The result is that we’re the world’s best waiters. But servants rob and don’t even trust other servants. Look at our politicians who competed as robbers for decades! Italians are provincial, presumptuous, arrogant, rude, spoilt, not generous. Italian mothers fill their children’s heads with nonsense about them being the best and most beautiful yet the book of Italian heroes is a very slim volume . . . of course, one shouldn’t generalise” (Sydney Morning Herald, Good Weekend, 10 September 1994, p. 60)

Toscani’s colourful comments probably would not be quite as amusing coming from the mouth of a non-Italian. The exercise of imagining the impact of the same text if it were uttered by a person of a non-Italian nationality provides a simple but effective demonstration of the importance of the context of an act of stereotyping. While contemporary models of semiotics are strong on identifying the social factors in context, they are virtually silent on the influence of psychological factors. As argued in Chapter 1, neither conventionalist semiotic resources nor communicative transactions utilising those resources can be fully understood without reference to psychological factors. For example in order to understand the impact of the social contextual factors in communication—such as the communicator’s social class and ethnic group membership—we have to understand the communicator’s thoughts, feelings and attitudes to their class and ethnic group membership.

Without reference to psychological factors, however, we cannot know exactly what an individual who uses ethnic stereotypes is actually doing and therefore we cannot fully understand what their messages mean. This can be illustrated by reference to van Dijk’s (1991) extensive analysis of racism in the press. While van Dijk identifies social domination as a pervasive function of stereotyping, his analysis is limited in that he ignores psychological factors. As a result, he does not identify any other functions of racist or stereotyped representations.

Contemporary racism is a complex societal system in which peoples of European origin dominate peoples of other origins, especially in Europe, North America, South Africa, Australia, and New Zealand. This relation of
dominance may take many forms of economic, social, cultural and/or political hegemony, legitimated in terms of, usually, negatively valued, different characteristics ascribed to the dominated peoples. (1991, p. 24)

Without a psychological account, important aspects of domination remain unanswered. Is the domination, by means of negative ascription, a conscious or unconscious strategy? Is it intended or is it an unintended consequence of action with a non-racist goal? Only a case-by-case analysis that incorporates reference to psychological factors can answer these questions. When psychological factors are taken into account, a range of explanations of stereotyping becomes possible. Thus stereotyping and ethnocentrism in advertising may be a manifestation of one or more of the following aspects:

(1) Conative/functional aspect: white males dominate the advertising industry in Australia. If they can sell products and promote a male Anglo-centred view of the world, they may be motivated to do so because it enhances their own social position.

(2) Cognitive aspect: If stereotypes are simplified, their use in advertisements will facilitate faster cognitive processing and better retention in memory by the audience.

(3) Emotional aspect: If ethnic stereotypes are components of prejudice, stereotyping in advertisements will appeal to one or more of the affective and social needs.

(4) Each of the above may operate at a latent or manifest level: At a manifest level, the function of advertisements is usually to sell products. At a latent (less obvious) level, their function may be to position minority social groups in subordinate role.

These hypothetical examples point to the conclusion that various approaches to the analysis of stereotyping (conative/functional, cognitive, and emotional) are
useful, but only an analysis that includes psychological factors is sensitive to the full range of functions that stereotypes can serve.

5.1.3. Stereotypes and psychosemiotics

Bird’s (1999) analysis of Native American stereotypes is consistent with the model developed in the present work. Her approach illustrates the benefits of including psychological concepts in an analysis of media stereotypes. Bird recognises that there is more to stereotypes that their ideational content: “The 1990s lovely princess and Native American stud may be more benign images than the earlier squaw or crazed savage, but they are equally unreal and dehumanising” (p. 61). In other words the relationship between emotion and stereotyping is complicated by the fact that the manifest positive emotional content of the stereotype can coexist with negative functions. Bird’s (1999) analysis suggests that positive and negative media evaluations of Native American women are two sides of the same coin:

Just as popular imagery defined White women as either good or bad, virgin or whore, so it forced images of American Indian women into a similar dichotomy. The “Indian princess” is defined as one who helps or saves a White man, but if she actually has a sexual relationship with a man, she becomes a squaw, who is lower even than a bad White woman. (p. 73)

One of the implications of this approach is that the meaning of stereotyping in this case is entwined with motivational as well as cognitive constructs. Psychoanalytic concepts such as idealisation and splitting in fantasy images are relevant to this analysis. Hecht (1998), too, alludes to psychosocial concepts that have informed research on prejudice. He argues that this body of research has focused on the following themes

(a) Fear of difference.
(b) Dislike of difference.
(c) Difference as a basis for competition.
(d) Difference as a basis for hierarchy.
Bird’s (1999) analysis suggests that we can add a fifth concept:

(e) Idealisation of difference.

In psychodynamic theory, idealisation is motivated by “the vicissitudes of satisfaction, frustration and anger” (Moore and Fine, 1990). The vicissitudes in idealisation are illustrated by Pettigrew’s (1999) observation that “slaveholders were sometimes emotionally attached to their house slaves, yet such positive feelings swiftly transformed into antipathy when the severe codes of the master-slave relation were violated” (p. 532). Hence some instances of idealisation, when examined in the context of the idealiser’s psychic economy are attempts to secure the idealised person’s beneficence or obedience. This interpersonal dimension of idealised conceptions and representations only becomes apparent if the cognitive content of stereotypes is considered in conjunction with their emotional and interpersonal function.

5.2. EXAMINING ETHNOMETHODOLOGY

It was argued in Chapter 2 that some of the more abstract principles of qualitative research were unsound because they contravened the principles of realism and failed to provide an adequate account of action, including semiotic action. It was also argued that qualitative research methodologies were logically sound. A closer analysis of the ethnomethodological approach to qualitative research, including an ethnomethodological case study, illustrates these points and reveals the advantages of a psychosemiotic approach.

According to Giddens (1984), ethnomethodology has its philosophical roots in phenomenology, Wittgensteinian philosophy and the ordinary language philosophy of John Austin, all of which “involve a defence of the mundane” (p. 59). Ethnomethodology is oriented to surface phenomena such as everyday use of language, the commonsense of social members, and their implicit knowledge of
cultural routines (Giddens, 1984). According to Potter and Wetherell (1987) ethnomethodology “is concerned with the study of (ology) ordinary people’s (ethno) methods; the methods in question being those used for producing and making sense of everyday social life” (p. 18). Lull (1980) states that ethnomethodology is a term “intended to direct researchers to observation and interpretation of the social ‘methods’ of their subjects as the substance for analysis, particularly routine behaviours which are often overlooked” (p. 208). Lull (1980) regards ethnomethodology and ethnography as intimately related. He argues that as soon as an ethnomethodological perspective is taken, an ethnographic research strategy suggests itself and the most important methods in that research strategy are extended observation or participant-observation. Potter (1996) describes ethnography as the exploration of “how communities are created and held together with human interactions” (p. 51), while ethnomethodology is “the study of how people make sense out of everyday life” (p. 53). Thus, there is a greater emphasis on participants’ perspectives in ethnomethodology. Potter (1996) listed ethnomethodology and ethnography amongst the six major methodologies of qualitative research.

5.2.1 Philosophical principles of ethnomethodology

Both ethnography and ethnomethodology are influenced by phenomenology, which has its roots in the philosophy of Immanuel Kant, who held that human reason can only know phenomena and can never penetrate to noumena, which is the reality behind appearances. Conducting ethnomethodologically inspired research means putting aside the question of the truth, or falsity, of the person’s beliefs and simply accepting them as they are . . . In contrast to this suspension of disbelief strategy, those investigators of a more scientific bent of mind employ the suspension of belief technique, where nothing is taken as granted and the aim is to explain the reality behind appearances. (Garfinkel, 1967, pp. 272-273)

Ethnomethodology extends the phenomenological focus on insiders’ perspectives to insiders’ activities:
Ethnomethodology’s conception of an ‘inside understanding’ refers to getting a procedural grip on the activities, while other qualitative researchers might want to understand the motivations or perspectives of the relevant actors. (ten Have, 2004, p. 161)

Unfortunately, the narrow focus in ethnomethodology on the participant as social member excludes the study of the individual beyond that membership. What is of interest in ethnomethodology is a participant’s role in particular social contexts, rather than an individual’s motivation for occupying that role. As ten Have states, “ethnomethodology is not interested in ‘individuals’ as such, but in the competencies involved in being a bona-fide member of a collectivity” (2004, p. 152). Similarly, Garfinkel describes traditional social science as a setting where

Populations are usually treated as straightforward counts of bodies. The [ethnomethodological] proposal . . . is instead that it is the workings of the phenomenon that exhibit among its other details the population that staffs it. (1996, p. 5)

Garfinkel gives examples of what he means by this unique approach to questions of agency:

It is the workings of the traffic that make its staff available as “typical” drivers, “bad” drivers, “close in” driver . . . The Conversational Analysis of talk provides another example. It starts with conversation which exhibits its speakers as typical, recurring . . . staff. (1996, p. 5)

Hence ethnomethodology is a social situationist approach, subject to the limitations outlined by Campbell (1996) discussed in Chapter 2. The problematic exclusion of the notion of individual action from psychological and sociological explanation is also evident in the ethnomethodology of Holstein and Gubrium (1998). These authors subscribe to the view that the study of ordinary conversation is focused on structural features “independent of the psychological or other characteristics of particular speakers, representing ubiquitous features of talk-in-interaction itself to which participants orient” (1998, p. 144). The notion of speakers orienting themselves to conversation in a particular context nevertheless suggests some reference to intentional action. The following statement by the authors contradicts their anti-individual position:
Practitioners of everyday life are not “organizational dopes,” mere extensions of organizational thinking. They exercise interpretative discretion, mediated by complex layerings of interpretative influence. They also carry with them the biological basis for resistance, personal and interpersonal histories that compete with organisational categories as a means for interpreting experience. (Holstein & Gubrium, 1998, p. 150)

This account of communication is in keeping with the realist model developed in the present work and sits in conflict with the authors’ claim that ethnomethodological analysis of ordinary conversation is focused on structural features independently of psychological or other features of the speakers. Another weakness in Holstein & Gubrium’s conceptualisation is their claim that conversational exchanges construct reality. They argue that traditional ethnographies treat language as a neutral vehicle for describing cultures. In contrast, ethnomethodological approaches take a more constructionist approach, treating objective reality as an interactional and discursive accomplishment; descriptions, accounts, or reports are not merely about some social world as much as they are constitutive of that world. This approach does not attempt to generate information about interaction and discourse through interviews or questionnaires, but relies upon naturally occurring talk. (Holstein and Gubrium, 1998, p. 143)

The notion of the social construction of reality is a variant of a self-refuting idealist position. It is self-refuting in that it presupposes an independently existing reality that is the object of constructions. If \( x \) is used in the construction of \( y \), however, then \( x \) must exist independently of \( y \) and is in principle just as knowable as \( y \).

5.2.2 O’Halloran’s case study of Alcoholics Anonymous

While there is nothing that can be salvaged from the philosophical position of ethnomethodology, it does have some logically sound methodological aspects. Some of the methodological strengths and limitations of the ethnomethodological strategies of investigation can be illustrated by means of an
analysis of O’Halloran’s (2003) case study of an Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) group. One of the strengths of the ethnomethodological approach that O’Halloran adopts is the commitment to detailed field work with detailed field notes. This results in a “thick description” of AA meetings. O’Halloran was fortunate to be present at a meeting where a new member attended, as this provided more opportunities to explicate some of the conversational rules of the meeting because they were consistently violated by the newcomer and thrown into sharp relief when more established members attempted to restore order in the situation. The newcomer asked for advice and attempted to engage in dialogue, whereas these activities are reserved for the informal interaction after the meeting while meetings themselves are reserved for more circumscribed or set piece communications such as readings from literature and monologic sharing of personal testimonies related to recovery (or lapse). This “breach” situation is of special interest to ethnomethodologists.

Ethnography and ethnomethodology both help to explicate the unspoken situational rules, procedures or conventions of actions that are tied to a particular situation. O’Halloran contrasts the two approaches as follows:

1. The ethnographic way—ask the members about what they do (i.e., seek out their explicit knowledge of their own categories’ rules).
2. The ethnomethodological way—examine the discourse itself in great detail to unravel what the members do to seek out the implicit rules which govern the practice. (2003, p. 91)

O’Halloran (2003) contrasts approaches such as Milton Maxwell’s ethnographic study of AA with his own ethnomethodological study. Maxwell’s *The AA Experience* was, like O’Halloran’s analysis, based on participant observation. While Maxwell also used AA members as informants, O’Halloran has not. O’Halloran argues that AA provides members with pre-formulated narratives which structure their experience: “The ‘person’ who emerges from the narrative has been fashioned in recovery stories, has been reinterpreted through
AA perspectives” (p. 83). Thus, in contrast to ethnography, ethnomethodology makes the assumption that language is *constitutive* of the social context rather than *reflective* of the social context. O’Halloran (2003) argues that the stories in Maxwell’s collection of AA members’ experiences are interesting insights into how members have constructed their past. However, Maxwell does not use them as such but as data for describing the developmental stages and nature of actual, active alcoholism itself. (2003 p. 83)

O’Halloran explains that an ethnomethodolgist would take a more “post-modern approach”, which involves a reading of texts as *constructed* by social group members. He notes, in support of this approach, that many of the biographical stories articulated by AA members are couched in the language of the AA movement:

> Phrases like ‘I could neither drink nor leave it alone’, ‘hard to accept reality’, ‘a life without alcohol’ . . . represent the view of an acculturated member of AA. . . . Telling of the past reveals perhaps more about the teller’s current state of knowledge than it does about the events being referred to. (2003, p. 83)

While there is nothing wrong with analysing the discursive conventions regulating talk at AA meetings, this is a starting point for understanding communication at AA meetings rather than a comprehensive account of that communication. O’Halloran’s ethnomethodological analysis does not take into account broader social factors or psychological factors relevant to the analysis of communicative conventions or communicative acts.

*Social factors external to AA discourse influence the use and structure of AA discourse*

Social factors, including religious practices such as public confession and mores regarding abstinence from alcohol were instrumental in the formative period of AA. The same social forces continue to shape the structure and
interpretation of AA discourse. There was a feminist AA meeting in the Sydney suburb of Balmain where Step 3 of the AA recovery program was reinterpreted so as to refer to God using a feminine rather than masculine pronoun:

Step 3: Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understand Her.

New members can also bring with them preconceptions drawn from popular culture that lead them to challenge the principles of AA. The following are some of the broader social values that are in opposition to the values espoused in AA literature.

1. Many cultural groups value self-control. In contrast, AA asks members to turn to a greater power for help. The concept of powerlessness in AA to some extent derives its meaning from its relationship with the positive valuation of self-control in the broader community.

2. Many cultural groups value independence in the sense of being self-reliant, whereas AA promotes regression to a dependent state, in the form of the mutual dependence of group members.

3. In the received Western moral system moderate social drinking and in some sub-cultures, binge drinking, is valued. AA values complete abstinence.

4. In Western society spiritual matters are generally separated from psychotherapeutic matters. In Alcoholics Anonymous, adherence to the spiritual notion of the greater power is considered essential to recovery.

Hence there are important aspects of the communicative context of AA meetings beyond the norm-governed talk and procedures emphasised in ethnomethodology. Examples of relevant broader social currents include the rise of feminism, the positive valuation of self-control, the widespread acceptance of social drinking, and the alignment of psychotherapy with secular values rather than religious or spiritual values. AA has countered objections to the quasi-
spiritual nature of its program by encouraging atheist or agnostic members to interpret the notion of the greater power as referring to the group itself, or to some other material entity, rather than interpreting the greater power as a deity. Individuals who are influenced by monotheistic ideologies may have difficulty interpreting the notion of a greater power in secular terms. This is illustrated in the ubiquitous misinterpretation of the AA reference to the greater power or “God as we understand him” as a reference to a higher power, even though there is no mention of the higher power in the Twelve Steps. Consider the reference of O’Halloran himself:

They [AA members] use concepts like God or a higher power to give meaning to their experience which may appear intellectually inexplicable. (p. 86)

The interpolation of the higher power is illustrative of the impact of external discourses that AA members bring with them to the movement. The metaphor embedded in the notion of a higher power betrays its origins in the sky or heavenly God worshipped by Christians, and stands in contrast to the feminine deities which are more likely to be associated with the Earth (cf. Suttie, 1934/1960). O’Halloran’s ethnomethodological approach is unable to account for these discursive or extra-situational aspects of language use because of the focus on internal aspects of semiotic resources:

Much of AA talk has been shown to be marked by intertextual references to AA literature and slogans. . . . This is an important aspect of how speakers orient their experiences, past and present, to the AA programme and the experience of other recovering alcoholics. Marking such intertextual features, a practice derived from discourse analysis, would help explicate text and intertextual coherence and cohesiveness. Such however would be a departure from normal conversational analysis practice where only audible data is indicated through transcription and the focus is exclusively on language form. (O’Halloran, 2003, p. 93)

As Anderson (1938/1962) demonstrated, causal explanations, such as explanations of the effect of the AA literature on AA talk, have to take into account the causal field or context in which that causal relationship takes place.
O’Halloran’s focus is on the situational perspective; his analysis is geared to the analysis of conversation in order to understand methods of managing various conventionalised aspects of social interaction at the meetings, such as how deviations from meeting etiquette are dealt with. The situational perspective, the broader cultural perspective and the individual actor’s subjective or motivational perspective are equally important for an understanding of what an actor is doing and what is happening at AA meetings.

While conversational analysis yields a description of conversation in terms of situational and discursive conventions, it cannot provide an explanation of what goes on at AA meetings. Such an account requires psychological concepts in addition to the broader social and cultural factors discussed above.

**Individual factors influence the use of AA discourse**

While ethnomethodology is equipped to study situational resources for meaning-making, it is not equipped to study individual or cultural meaning making resources, or the mechanisms whereby individuals subscribe or fail to subscribe to these factors. O’Halloran criticises approaches where context is conceptualised as a “container where pre-existing hierarchical features within that context exert causal forces over available actions” (p. 86). He promotes the ethnomethodological approach where the investigation is oriented to understanding “how participants’ interaction constitutes a context which enables them to accomplish discoursal [sic] events for their own particular ends” (p. 86). While the reference to participants’ ends and goals suggests a subjective and motivational perspective, this is submerged in O’Halloran’s discussion by a focus on *inter*-subjective rather than subjective factors. While a focus on situational inter-subjective factors is valid, it cannot be the basis for a comprehensive understanding of social and psychological phenomena and represents a diminution of the interpretative and qualitative research traditions. One of the major projects of the qualitative research tradition can be summarised as the quest to understand action from the actor’s point of view (Campbell 1996; Potter, 1996).
Much of O’Halloran’s observations are couched in a conversational analysis framework. For example, he notes that “when the newcomer interrupted with a direct question, the resulting responses showed another return to adjacency pairing” (p. 90) or “There were longer invitations to others to take their turn either through pausing or eye contact” (p. 90). The newcomer’s violation of the AA rules gives numerous clues to her psychological state which is left unanalysed by O’Halloran. One of the most salient motivational constructs in social cognition is the degree of voluntariness of behaviour. The newcomer’s tears imply partial loss of voluntary control, as is suggested by the following description: “The newcomer cried quietly and apologised with conflicting suppressed tears and nervous laughter in her voice” (p. 89).

A naturalistic stance, interpreting an individual’s behaviour in terms of cause and effect relationships, is part of any day-to-day or scientific explanation. Thus we assume that, under normal circumstances, an individual who is shedding tears (like the newcomer in the AA meeting) is doing so involuntarily and is emotionally distressed. That the newcomer may be embarrassed about being there is implied in the following description:

When she stated she did not want to admit she was an alcoholic and that the idea of never drinking again seemed impossible to her, her eyes sought particular partners with whom to interact; suggesting a need for reassurance, advice or acknowledgment, and as such at variance with much AA interaction. (p. 90)

This account suggests that the newcomer was using the resources available to her in the form of general conversational conventions (looking at people in order to invite them to speak) for meeting an individual need (reassurance, advice, acknowledgment). In order to meet her individual need, she violated the specific conventions of the AA meeting.

O’Halloran’s ethnomethodological critique cannot provide a full account of action because the intentions and motivations of the actors cannot be captured
by an explication of conventions regulating conversation in particular social situations. It is interesting, for example to observe the way established members deflect the newcomer’s breaches of the situational order. For example, there are her attempts to engage in dialogue during the meeting:

She asked, “Should I get a sponsor?” The Chair, avoiding giving direct advice as the request required, shared about his own experience in finding a sponsor and the importance of that relationship to his recovery, but did not respond directly to the question . . . but instead used the conventional AA illustrative personal account. (O’Halloran, 2003, p. 89)

The question of how an intersubjective understanding of tacit AA procedural protocol is achieved is an important aspect of the actions of AA members. Such an approach is limited because it is geared to an analysis of a limited range of AA participants’ goals. O’Halloran is chiefly interested in the participant’s goals of maintaining the situational conventions of discourse. Thus we learn that the Chair of the meeting avoided giving advice in order to maintain the AA convention of learning by sharing personal testimony. Many actions at AA meetings cannot be understood if they are analysed only in terms of their conformity or lack of conformity to AA conventions.

Sperber and Wilson (1986) have highlighted that, in formulating and interpreting communicative actions, we rely on encyclopaedic knowledge as well as knowledge of codes and conventions. We assume that people at AA meetings are mainly there for the purpose of recovery from alcohol dependence, and interpret their conformity to AA communicative conventions as a means to this end. The newcomer, whose actions breach these conventions, is used by O’Halloran as a foil to illustrate those conventions; they are examined primarily in relation to the institutional order particular to the context of the meeting. From the newcomer’s point of view, however, her actions are more likely to be described as information seeking or, more generally, as attempts to allay her confusion, rather than as breaches. O’Halloran accepts that one of the motivations for the newcomer’s disruptive actions was to seek reassurance. This observation is valid, but beyond the ethnomethodological framework. From an ethnomethodological or
intersubjective perspective, the analysis of her behaviour would be the same, irrespective of her intentions, because it is only her behaviour in relation to the institutional order that matters. In contrast, a psychosemiotic approach demonstrates that there is a good deal more that is relevant to an analysis of her communication.

The insiders’ perspectives valued in O’Halloran’s case study are compatible with scientific perspectives

The phenomenological movement has left its legacy in the greater sensitivity to actors’ experiences and accounts of what they are doing (the “insiders” perspective). This stands in contrast to the outside observer’s, or scientist’s, perspective on action. According to O’Halloran, the chief difference between his and Maxwell’s approach is in the conceptualisation of the data collected, in that Maxwell regarded data collected at AA meetings as information about the phenomenon of alcoholism, including its stages and the role of AA in recovery from alcoholism. O’Halloran regards the data as a source of information about how members construct reality through social interaction, particularly through their norm-governed talk. In short, O’Halloran adopts an insider’s approach while Maxwell adopts a more external, and putatively objective, approach. There is evidence, however, that insiders are quite capable of employing naturalistic (cause-effect) understandings of action (for example: ‘He didn’t say anything because he had a memory lapse’) as well as those incorporating what Daniel Dennett has called the intentional stance (for example: ‘He changed the subject because he felt uncomfortable about discussing it over dinner’). Insiders are by no means limited to accounts of behaviour couched in terms of social norms. An example of a normative explanation is ‘he changed the subject because it was the appropriate thing to do’.

O’Halloran himself shows inclinations towards supplementing the AA insiders’ perspectives with those of the scientific outsider. O’Halloran discusses Gregory Bateson’s cybernetic model of alcoholism, for example. In this theory, an
alcoholic adopts a Cartesian view of the self, imagining the flesh as weak and the mind, in its executive function, as responsible for repairing the body’s impaired self control. Maclaine (2001), in developing a Batesonian approach to therapy argued that the alcoholic identifies with this conscious executive self, without recognising that this self is just as alcohol dependent as the rest of the self he or she is attempting to repair. In other words, for an alcohol-dependent person to manage his or her own recovery is considered analogous to leaving Count Dracula in charge of the blood bank. The AA first step of admitting powerlessness over alcohol encourages abandonment of the notion of fixing oneself through will power. In turning to greater power individuals are coaxed into abandoning the dualistic self-conceptualisation entailed in the notion of ‘controlling oneself’ (mind controlling the body or another part of the self). Turning to a greater power also means turning to self-management strategies that do not rely on will power. For example, by ‘avoiding people, places and things’ associated with alcohol, the alcoholic circumvents the issue of putting his or her will power to the test (Maclaine, 2001).

In summary, O’Halloran’s approach underutilises several sources of information that can profitably be brought to bear on the analysis of communicative conventions and communicative acts relevant to AA meetings. The sources of information can be summarised as follows:

1. Scientific perspectives on AA discourse and practices
2. Broader social factors, that are not part of situational conventions and which influence AA discourse.
3. Individual psychological factors that influence the use of AA discourse
5.3. GAMBLING IN POPULAR CULTURE

In addition to semiotic concepts, psychological concepts are required for a comprehensive analysis of representations relating to gambling in arenas such as advertising, pop songs, film, news media, or gaming machine iconography.

Gaming machine iconography represents one of the most primitive semiotic systems. Gaming machine displays carry two basic meanings. Particular alignments or patterns of icons in the display usually signify winning. Conversely, the absence of alignment or patterning in the display of icons signifies losing. From a purely semiotic point of view, the use of alignment to signify winning and non-alignment to signify losing is arbitrary. The display could just as easily have been designed so that non-alignment signifies winning and alignment signifies losing. If we pose the important question of why semiotic systems are the way they are, the answer we get in the case of gaming machine displays leads us to concepts, such as order and chaos, which are at the centre of our cultural, social, and even biological existence.

It has been argued throughout this work that analyses of the structural or systemic dimension of signifiers need to be supplemented with analyses of the transactional aspect of signifiers. The quest for an understanding of how signifiers are used leads us to an investigation of the characteristics of the user. One of the advantages of an approach that includes an analysis of the characteristics of the sign user in semiosis is that it allows for the utilisation of psychological concepts. In the case of gaming machine iconography, an important psychological concept is the symbolic compromise formation (Freud, 1900; Campbell, 1949; Erdelyi 1985; Mann, 1994). A compromise formation is a manifestation of latent conflicts in the individual or society. It serves simultaneously to conceal, express, and meet (in a limited way) underlying individual needs or conflicting social forces. Intrapsychic conflict is a ubiquitous fact of life. A person may wake up, for example, to find that part of them wants to go back to sleep, and another part wants to go to work. A third part criticises their real or imagined laziness. This
internal critic is known as the conscience in everyday language, or the “superego” in the psychoanalytic model (Freud 1933/1965). Berne (1964) called it the “critical parent”, and cognitive therapists call it a “negative self-schema” (Williams 1996). Behaviourally oriented thinkers might describe the situation as a case of “approach-avoidance conflict”. This internal critic can be appeased when the person dozes off and dreams that they are awake and diligently performing their tasks for that day. In this case, the dream is a symbolic compromise formation. Such symbolic compromises can also occur in waking life. Therapists working with problem gamblers are familiar with the way that, for example, playing electronic gaming machines can be used simultaneously to engage in, as well as to avoid, socialising, or simultaneously to escape from financial responsibility while attempting to solve their financial problems. Compromise formations also occur at a social level. Therefore gambling symbolism can be analysed as a compromise formation arising from conflicting forces in society.

5.3.1. Structuralist semiotic analysis

In order to understand the semiotics of gaming machine iconography, a structuralist semiotic approach, which focuses on systems of meaning, is a good starting point. In the process of applying this approach, however, we are drawn inevitably into psychological concepts.

Semiotic analysis often focuses on the explication of the rules of combination and substitution of signifiers. If we consider the combinations of icons created by the display of electronic gaming machine reels as a string of signifiers, the two basic categories of meaning are alignment and non-alignment of icons. Some non-alignments, known as “scatters”, can also constitute a win. A scatter is usually constituted by the presence of a pre-defined set of non-aligned signifiers within the display.

Barthes (1968) discussed a structuralist strategy for explicating the meaning of a string of signifiers by substituting one element of the string with
another, hypothetical, element in order to assess the impact on the meaning of the whole. He called this the commutation test. We can also use the commutation test to explore the semiotic consequences of introducing an *additional* element to the pool of available signifiers in a particular system. For example, a three-reel gaming machine might be composed of images of the three most common citrus fruits: lemons, limes and oranges. We can then imagine the changes in connotative meaning that result if we add a different type of icon, such as the numeral seven, to the set of citrus fruits. A numeral is a more abstract icon than a fruit icon. Moreover, when they are considered as part of the same set, fruit icons and number icons become part of a superordinate category which, in contrast to the set of fruits, cannot be described in concrete terms. The superordinate category has to be described in abstract terms, such as a set of potentially lucky icons or talismans. In short, the introduction of a numeral icon to the set of fruit icons subtly changes the meaning of the fruit icons. It shifts the meaning of the fruits away from their concrete manifestation as citrus fruits towards their more abstract embodiment as potentially lucky objects.

### 5.3.2. Historical analysis

Further insights into the meaning of modern gaming machine iconography can be gained by means of a historical analysis. While the semiotic approach is good at describing semiotic systems, we need to look beyond semiotics to find out why a semiotic system has the structure it does. Marshall Fey (1983) explains that mechanical and later electronic gaming machines came to be known as “fruit machines” because of the fruit symbols used on the early three-reel gaming machines. Fey notes that lemons were losing symbols on the early “three-reelers” and that this is the origin of the use of the term *lemon* to describe a bad car or other faulty mechanical product. Perhaps it is not an accident that the sourest fruit was used to signify loss. The biology and psychology of taste sensation is clearly relevant here. The emergence of fruit iconography in gaming machines (rather than, say, vegetable iconography) is probably not arbitrary, but influenced by the biological fact that food with a higher sugar content is relatively more rewarding.
for humans (Pelchat, 2002) and can thereby better tap into regressive fantasies relating to feeding and emotional dependence (cf. Maze, 1987).

An account of the historical evolution of gaming machines is incomplete without reference to the semiotic transformations that were part of the evolution of these machines. Some of these early machines were designed to dispense fruit-flavoured chewing gum. This was part of the manufacturers’ strategy to circumvent prohibitions against gambling by disguising gaming machines as vending machines (Fey, 1983). These hybrid vending-gaming machines are a manifestation of a clash between contradictory forces. On one side were forces such as the desire for profit and pleasure. On the other side were forces such as temperance, prohibition and rational thinking.

The images that illustrate gaming machine displays are also shaped by a clash of social forces resulting in a symbolic compromise. Gaming machine producers also know, intuitively or explicitly, that they must accommodate several contradictory currents in society. This can be illustrated by means of an analysis of an early gaming machine, known as the Liberty Bell. This gaming machine was named after a large bell commissioned by the Pennsylvanian government as a monument representing some of the political ideals valued in the United States. The original Liberty Bell was an imposing 3.6 metres in circumference. It was delivered to the US from London in 1752. It bears God’s words to Moses: “Proclaim Liberty throughout all the land unto all the inhabitants thereof” (Lev. 25:10). The name “Liberty Bell” was applied for the first time in an 1839 Abolitionist pamphlet. According to an untrue legend, it was rung on 4 July 1776 to signal the adoption of the Declaration of Independence. It is true, however, that it cracked upon testing and was repaired. On a later occasion, when it was rung for George Washington’s birthday in 1846, it cracked irreparably. Hence today it is never vigorously rung but lightly tapped. In 1915 the Bell travelled to an exhibition on the west coast of the USA, home of the Liberty Bell gaming machine (Independence Hall Association, 2002).
The Liberty Bell slot machine was born out of an environment where social forces facilitative to gambling, such as technological innovation, the California gold rush, commercial interests and everyday faith in luck clashed with anti-gambling social forces such as the temperance movement, the policy of Prohibition, desire to protect the young from experiences beyond their developmental level, and rational resistance against fantasy gratification. What better way to fight the gambling regulation lobby than to clothe a slot machine with a grand symbol of American freedom such as the Liberty Bell? (cf. Fey 1983).

If they are considered as symbolic compromise formations, gaming machine displays share features in common with symbols of cultural mythology and ideology as well as symbols of the individual imagination. The example of the mythological Minotaur, and the imaginative feat of the woman who dreams of her homely lover looking a bit like a Hollywood actor, are examples of condensation (Freud 1900), or the superimposition of elements in the service of contradictory impulses. Campbell (1949) notes the role of symbolism in myths and films in serving to gloss over social contradictions:

In the United States there is . . . a pathos of inverted emphasis: the goal is not to grow old but to remain young; not to mature away from the Mother but to cleave to her. And, so, while husbands are worshipping at their boyhood shrines, being lawyers, merchants, or masterminds their parents wanted them to be, their wives, even after fourteen years of marriage and two fine children produced and raised, are still on the search for love—which can come to them only from the centaurs, sileni, satyrs and other concupiscent incubi of the rout of Pan, either . . . in dreams or as in our popular, vanilla-frosted temples of the venereal goddess, under the make-up of the latest heroes of the screen. (p. 11-12)

5.3.3. Psychosemiotic analysis

The previous discussion suggests that, ultimately, the historical analysis of gaming machine iconography cannot be separated from an analysis of the social, economic and psychological functions of the iconography. Gaming machine designers rely on semiotic media to strike a balance between enticing the player
and relieving them of their money. Joe Karminkow, at one time Vice President of International Game Technology, stated that designing games takes “a tremendous amount of intuition. We have to make our product win in design, but also take. It’s about finding the balance, giving the right amount of candy” (Abrams, 1999, p. 62). Gaming machine symbolism disguises the main purpose of gaming machines with a “sugar coating”, and the intuition Karminkow refers to taps into a vast reservoir of cultural meanings and intuitions about the psychology of gamblers. A trade advertisement for a poker machine, featuring the ancient Greek mythological figure Adonis, alludes to this process: “Mythology also comes alive as the ADONIS substitute and scattered COIN symbols animate when in winning combination. Tempt players with this game and the gods will smile on your casino floor” (Aristocrat Technologies Australia, 2001, p. 39)

The work of Jakobson (1960) can be used as a stimulus for exploring further the psychological dimensions of gaming machine iconography. As discussed in section 3.3.2 of the present work, Jakobson (1960) developed a system of classifying the various functions of communication according to the element of communication that dominates in a particular communicative exchange. Jakobson’s approach reminds us that communication goes beyond the “transmission” of ideational or factual content. While communication is about the context or factual states of affairs, there are other functions fulfilled by communication, such as building relationships, persuading, venting emotion and playing. In cases such as these, reference to states of affairs is secondary. While communication involves each of the elements, as displayed in Figure 9, not all of the elements will be equally prominent.

**Figure 9: Jakobson’s elements of communication**

| Context |
|-------------------------|-------------------|
| Communicator------------| Message------------|
| Message----------------| Audience-----------|
| Contact/Channel         | Code              |
Figure 9 represents the process whereby the communicator uses a code to construct a message about a context or state of affairs. The message is transmitted through a channel, or medium, of communication to an audience. Based on the six elements of communication, Jakobson identified six functions of communication, as depicted in Figure 10.

**Figure 10: Jakobson’s functions of communication**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Referential</th>
<th>Emotive</th>
<th>Aesthetic</th>
<th>Conative</th>
<th>Phatic</th>
<th>Metalingual</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Jakobson noted a correlation between the elements of communication and the functions of communication. Thus, if the focus of an act of communication is on the communicator, then the emotive function dominates (as in the case of swearing, for example). If the focus of an act of communication is predominantly on the audience, then the conative, or rhetorical, function dominates, and so on.

Jakobson’s schema can be applied to non-verbal modes of communication. In the case of the Liberty Bell gaming machine, conative and aesthetic functions dominate. Broadly speaking, the Liberty Bell gaming machine illustrates the use of aesthetic appeal to legitimate the practice of gambling and to entice the audience to play. The Liberty Bell display also illustrates the concept of nested functions, in that the aesthetic function is co-opted in the service of the conative function. In other words, the Liberty Bell iconography is used to lure potential gamblers to deposit their money in the machine.
For a fuller understanding of concept of nested functions, a brief excursion into the work of John Searle is in order. Searle’s (1979) conceptualisation of indirect speech acts presupposes the notion of nested communicative functions. For example, a statement such as “I wonder what the time is right now” describes a state of mind and thereby fulfills the referential function. It can be used in the service of the conative function: requesting information from the addressee or audience. In this example, the nesting of a function within another function is governed by convention. It is courteous to make requests indirectly and there are conventions for enacting social courtesies in communication.

Another example of a nested communicative function is contained in the indirect speech act “Can you pass the salt?” Here a request for service (“pass me the salt!”) is nested, or embedded, in a request for information. The request for information can be paraphrased as “are you physically capable of passing the salt?”. The ultimate goal is to get service but the proximate goal is a request for information. A conventional code allows us to interpret the request for information as a request for service. Knowledge of a code of etiquette allows us to arrive at an understanding of the speaker’s ultimate goal even though only the proximate goal has been expressed.

It may be illuminating to compare the request for salt example with the example of the Liberty Bell gaming machine. In the case of the Liberty Bell, there are also proximate communicative goals—to create aesthetic pleasure and to legitimate gambling by aligning it with values of freedom and democracy. The ultimate goal, of course, is to persuade the consumers to part with their dimes, and to do so willingly, such that, even if they lose, they will be happy to return. But there is no conventional link between proximate and ultimate goals in this case. The communicator’s (machine vendor, designer and manufacturer) ultimate goal is transparent, but the link between this ultimate goal and the proximate goals of pleasing the audience with the design and appeasing them with ideological legitimation, is opaque. Instead of convention linking these functions, there is a meaning connection in the minds of the communicators.
The Liberty Bell gaming machine iconography and the verbal request “Can you pass the salt?” are both examples of indirect communicative acts. The Liberty Bell producers attempt to persuade the consumer to play the machine by means of an appeal to their aesthetic and patriotic sensibilities. Analogously the person who asks, “Can you pass the salt?” thereby attempts to persuade the hearer to pass the salt by means of a closed question. This indirect, or polite, request is forged from the conflict between the desire to meet one’s needs and the desire not to offend others in doing so. The resulting communicative act is simultaneously a request for information and a request for service. Similarly, the Liberty Bell gaming machine is designed to simultaneously invite a consumer to play and legitimise the practice of gambling.

Films about gambling provide an additional realm by which to illustrate the richness abounding from an analysis that assumes the multiple functions of signifiers. Consider, for the purposes of comparison, an approach to film that is limited to the representational function of communication. Demet (1999) assesses films about gambling according to the degree to which they accurately represent the reality of gambling:

The purpose of this book is to determine whether “Hollywood’s” depiction of compulsive gambling has been accurate and responsible and whether this depiction has served as a warning to viewers about the potential dangers of gambling”. (p. ix)

According to Demet’s approach, films about gambling are judged good or bad according to how accurately or inaccurately they represent reality, and how well they promote consensual social goals. A problem with this approach is that it presupposes that film consumers are naïve and easily swayed by “irresponsible” or “unrealistic” films, and that the content of the film will be directly injected into the mind of the viewer without any mediation or cognitive assessment.

Another difficulty with Demet’s approach is that it does not take into account the film’s genre. One of the many films classed as “irresponsible” by
Demet is *Frankie and Johnny*. In this film, Johnny, played by Elvis Presley, is a gambler/singer on a Mississippi riverboat. Frankie is his girlfriend. Presley has a run of bad luck until a gypsy fortune-teller informs him that he will meet a red-haired woman who will bring him luck. When he meets redheaded Nellie, his jealous girlfriend inadvertently shoots him “but he lives and sings” (Nash et al., 1985, p. 930).

Demet (1999) correctly notes the lack of realism in Johnny beating the roulette wheel against long odds several times in a row. On the other hand, the genre of musical comedy itself is not realistic. In everyday life, people do not burst into song every ten minutes. The film could be interpreted as delivering the “message” that Johnny's gambling wins are as unrealistic as the film’s genre or as fantastic and improbable as his plot entanglements. From this point of view, *Frankie and Johnny* could be interpreted as delivering a responsible gambling message. Another possible interpretation is that Johnny is symbolically “punished” for dabbling in the occult (consulting a fortune-teller) by being shot. A more subtle analysis might pose the question of whether the depictions of gambling serve the function of driving the plot (the aesthetic function), informing about the world (representational function), persuading (conative function) and so on. Salient too, is the manner in which these functions are nested or subserve one another. It can be asked, for example, whether the aesthetic function serves the conative function, as in some propaganda films, or whether the conative function serves the aesthetic function. If *Frankie and Johnny* is primarily entertainment, then its dominant function is not to persuade us to gamble or not gamble, but rather, to gratify us in fantasy and persuade us to suspend disbelief.

### 5.3.4. Conclusion

Intrapersonal, interpersonal, and broader social conflicts may be simultaneously disguised and partially expressed, by means of semiotic media. In everyday conversation, for example, the conflict between requesting information and not wanting to appear too demanding may be mediated by an indirect or polite
question which represents a compromise between uttering the demand and not asking for assistance at all. The iconography of the Liberty Bell gaming machine demonstrates the same principle in operation at a social level. Its hybrid nature as gaming machine and patriotic symbol can be explained as a symptom of underlying social conflict between pro- and anti-gambling forces. While the Liberty Bell is now an antique, the challenge of symbolically mediating conflicting social forces is ever present. As Abrams (1999) states, “slot machine design is the result of a complex equation of mathematics, casino real-estate economics, demographics, state regulations, and popular culture” (p. 59).
CONCLUSION

Although the analysis of meaning and communicative phenomena would benefit from an approach that combines the investigative resources of psychology and semiotics, few scholars have attempted to draw upon both disciplines. Semiotic scholars have generally focused on the analysis of conventional systems of signifiers, or the resources of semiosis. They have used the conventional nature of signifying systems as a justification to seal off semiotics from other disciplines, apart from, occasionally, sociology. The present work supports the argument that such a strategy is not feasible because systems of signifiers are generally not constructed according to purely arbitrary principles. On the contrary, extra-systemic aspects of reality routinely influence the structure of systems of signifiers.

It is true that semioticians and other interpretative scholars have paid attention to peoples’ transactions with systemic resources, rather than just the conventional rules governing semiotic resources. They have failed, however, to explore the psychological implications of this. While some semioticians have turned to social-situational factors to understand the transactional aspect of semiotics, they have generally done so from the narrow perspective of the meaning-making options afforded by the semiotic resources, rather than from the point of view of the characteristics of agents of semiosis. Hammersley (2003) notes that some interpretative approaches downplay the material aspect of human existence. He adds that, while constructionism and ethnomethodology “insist that they respect the orientations of the people they study” (p. 773), both fields:

effectively deny what seems to be a near universal feature of human experience, and one that has been a driving concern behind much conventional social science: that we are part of a causal nexus of physical and social events which shapes how we think and act, and what we are able to accomplish. (p. 773)
Hammersley’s analysis alludes to broader oppositions between the quantitative-empirical and qualitative-interpretative traditions in psychology and the social sciences. The present work extends the psychosemiotics of Lang (1994), Markel (1997), and Smith (2001), by demonstrating that, within a realist framework based on the work of John Anderson, interpretative and scientific approaches can be integrated and applied to the explication of meaning-related phenomena.

The realist framework developed in the present work includes a philosophy of science that regards subjective phenomena, such as intentions and interpretations, to be as real as are the “objective data” studied in the quantitative-empirical tradition. From a realist perspective, the methods employed to investigate particular phenomena need to be based on a consideration of the nature of the phenomena, rather than on the ideological leanings of the researcher, the traditions of his or her discipline, or a narrow view of what constitutes scientific method. There are no logical grounds for the ideological, or semiotic, bifurcation of quantitative and qualitative methods. Unfortunately, this kind of bifurcation continues.

Future psychosemiotic investigators will face the challenge of steering a path between problematic aspects of qualitative-interpretative approaches and quantitative-empirical approaches. Many qualitative-interpretative approaches have been hijacked by post-modernist anti-scientific ideologies (Franklin, 2001). Quantitative-empirical approaches contain their own anti-scientific tendencies, such as the attempt to quantify variables without evidence that the variables are indeed quantities (Michell, 2001 & 2004). Also problematic in the quantitative-empirical tradition is the attempt to reduce phenomena such as thinking and acting, which involve relations between the person and the environment, to either internal cognitive representations or mere non-cognitive behavioural movements (Maze, 1983; Michell, 1988; Bruner, 1990).

One recent area of debate in the quantitative-empirical tradition of clinical psychology (echoed in medicine and other health sciences) is the need for
evidence-based practice. Thus, the randomised controlled trial has been promoted as the gold standard for assessing treatment psychotherapy effectiveness (Seligman, 1998; Nathan & Gorman, 2002). However, thorough critical evaluations and statistical re-analyses of research on anti-depressant medication (Kirsch, 2005) and psychotherapy (Wampold, 2001) have demonstrated that randomised control trial methodology provides no guarantee, in itself, of objective results. Limitations in the quantitative-empirical tradition such as these have exacerbated the bifurcation between natural science and interpretative investigation. Sugarman and Martin (2005), for example, argue that “most of the things that psychologists want to know are resistant to” scientific methods (p. 251).

The way forward, however, is not to abandon scientific methods as a means for investigating interpretative phenomena. Rather, progress will be achieved by adhering to a truly realist philosophy of science and applying the method or methods that are appropriate to the phenomena under investigation. In the case of psychosemiotics, the realist conceptualisation of the triadic relation at the heart of semiosis will mean that some combination of logical analysis, qualitative methods and quantitative methods will often be required.
REFERENCES


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