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THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

A SEMIOTIC APPROACH TO CURRICULUM INQUIRY:

AN OUTLINE.

BY

WINFIELD L. D. WILLIAMS

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND

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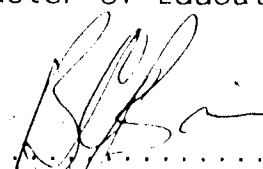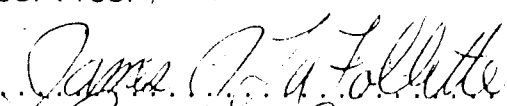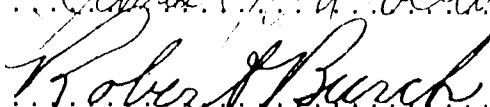
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Date: 24ᵀᴴ August 1987

ABSTRACT

The thesis represents an effort to contribute to the conceptually unstable field of curriculum studies by devloping an outline' of a semiotic approach to curriculum inquiry. The development of the outline has been based on the following notions:

1. The progress of curriculum as a field of studies has been hampered by the absence of a conceptual anchorage on an object domain within the educational situation.

2. There is no consensus within the field as to the grounding on which curriculum inquiry should proceed.

3. The content of education provides ideal anchorage since it is has a central position in the educational process.

4. The curriculum domain is, therefore, conceptualised as an interactional field in which people and object come together around the central component of content.

5. The focus of curr culum inquiry then becomes the exchange of messages which make interaction within the domain possible.

6. Access to these messages and their functions in the interaction is acheived by the study of those mediational devices by which the messages are constructed and conveyed.

7. . Semiotics is a field of study which is concerned with signs which express meaning and as such it may be usefully applied to the description and explanation of the interaction which takes place within the curriculum domain.

The substance of the outline developed from the foregoing assumptions is a proposal for the application of some basic ideas from the semiotic theories of Charles Peirce, Ferdinand de Saussure and Roland Barthes, to inquiry into the curriculum domain as it is conceptualised in 4. above. In an effort to concretise this proposal the content area of Home Economics is used as a point of reference.

It is felt that this study, because of its conceptual underpinnings, will provide a new perspective on curriculum inquiry which will be of use both at the level of theory and practice in the field.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

The field of educational studies embraces a number of subareas of interests which purport to understand educational phenomena from distinctive points of view. Among these are educational psychology, philosophy, and sociology of education. Curriculum is also such an area of interest, whose significance is growing in a number of ways, especially in terms of its prominence within the educational discourse.

However, its development as a theoretical field has been plagued by much conceptual instability due largely to the lack of consensus on the grounding on which inquiry should proceed and also on how the field should be conceptualised. Despite these problems, there has been a great deal of both practical and theoretical activity within the field, and much of this has been taken up with a continuing search for self-understanding. It is conceivable that such a search will continue to be a significant part of curriculum scholarship, if it is to make a significant impact on the understanding of educational phenomena.

The present study is intended to be an exploration into the curriculum domain, in an effort to contribute

to this ongoing task of its self-understanding and -definition. The approach to this task is informed by the notion that the domain is a social one constituted by a complex of interactions as the actors within it exchange messages about themselves and their world. This interactional situation is made possible by the pre-existence of the content of education, which has a determining influence on the interactions.

The focus of inquiry, then, becomes the complex of meanings which are generated and conveyed as the exchanges of messages take place around the central object of content. It is for this reason that the curriculum domain will be approached through the application of semiotics which is the study of meaning through signs.

Semiotics has been emerging as a significant field of inquiry over the past two decades. It has attracted scholars from a diversity of interests and backgrounds as they seek to view their particular undertakings from a different perspective. Although there is no consensus on the theoretical directions that semiotics should take, interest in it as a field of inquiry continues to increase, because it is based on the fundamental idea that mediation is the sine qua non of any form of interaction. Thus, it is felt that a focus on how

mediation is constituted and how it operates in the world, both social and natural, will ultimately reveal knowledge about any phenomena under scrutiny.

It is for this very reason that this present study attempts to explore how semiotics may be applied to the understanding of curriculum, which is obviously an interactional domain, where the educational intents of the society are played out. The principal objective of the study, therefore, is to develop an outline of a semiotic approach to curriculum inquiry. This outline will be based largely of the foundational ideas of the two co-founders of modern semiotics: Charles Peirce and Ferdinand de Saussure. The work of Roland Barthes will also be prominent since it represents a development on the ideas of Saussure.

The substance of the study will be organised into five sections - Chapters 2 to 6. In Chapter 2, an attempt will be made to articulate the ground on which the approach to inquiry will be developed. An analysis of a number of approaches to the search for grounding will be done in an effort to see how each one could be of use to the purpose of the chapter. The case will be made for the usefulness of subject matter/content as a point of departure for articulating the ground on which inquiry may proceed. The case will rest on the idea that

curriculum inquiry is best anchored on object within the educational domain and content will be the ideal anchor since it is unequivocally an educational object.

In Chapter 3, the the question of content will be looked at more closely, through an examination of a number of approaches to curriculum inquiry which locates content at the centre. These approaches will be analysed from three perspectives: philosophical, sociological and empirical. An assessment of the approaches will then be made in terms of their usefulness to understanding how content can be located at the centre of the domain.

Once content and the relationships it generates in the curriculum domain have been sketched, the study will move to Chapter 4 in which the ideas of Peirce, Saussure and Barthes will be briefly described and analysed against the background of a general overview of the semiotic field. It will be shown that in spite of certain shortcomings with respect to the study of social meaning, the ideas of all three semioticians present powerful methodological and conceptual tools for the investigation of social meaning.

In Chapter 5, the ideas of the three semioticians will be more closely studied in terms of their potential for actually undertaking social research since, as was said, before curriculum is essentially a social domain.

The basic point will be made that Peirce, on the one hand, and Saussure and Barthes on the other, may be combined to provide an adequate model for inquiry into social meaning. Hence, the basis for the semiotic approach to curriculum inquiry.

In the final chapter, the outline will be presented in such a way that it provides a model that can be used in the practical situation of curriculum inquiry. The semiotic ideas discussed in the previous chapters along with those on curriculum content will be brought together in the outline and substantiated with reference to the content area of Home Economics. During the course of this Chapter certain approaches to curriculum which clearly have a semiotic bent but not explicitly labelled as such will be examined along with other approaches which advocate the semiotic approach.

It is hoped that this semiotic approach to curriculum inquiry will open up a new perspective in the search for firm grounding for inquiry into the field.

It must be pointed out however that the outline of inquiry which is finally produced will necessarily be limited. It does not claim to present a comprehensive theoretical position which will be easily translated into a programme of action. Such an undertaking will be overly ambitious at this point, given the vastness of

the semiotic enterprise and also the state of knowledge
with respect the interactional possiblities in the
curriculum domain around the axis of content.

Rather, the usefulness of the study resides in its
heuristic potential as it provides a basic point of
departure for investigation into the many and varied
aspects of the complex and intractable curriculum
domain.

Chapter 2

Grounding for Curriculum Inquiry.

One óf the most widely used terms in current educational discourse is curriculum'. It is used not only by professional educators but also by laypersons with an interest in educational matters. Despite the widespread usage, there is little consistency in the way the term is used, especially among professional educators themselves. However, the frequent references to the term suggests that there exists a distinguishable aspect of educational phenomena which attracts attention in a significant way.

Within the broad field of educational studies curriculum refers to an area of scholarly activity which attempts to address educational problems in distinctive ways. Thus, it has a status similar to other subareas such as educational psychology, sociology, history or philosophy of education. However, curriculum is unique among these other areas of interest because it is not conceptually anchored in an established discipline outside of the field of education such as sociology or psychology. This is a significant point in that it may account for the struggles curriculum as a field of

inquiry has experienced in the search for self-definition and -understanding.

There is no doubt that curriculum has, over the years, become established as an area of study considered to have the potential to contribute to educational thought and practice in a significant way; at least at the level of commonsense. Despite this recognition, its development as a significant area of scholarship has been hampered by intellectual uncertainty in respect of substantive and methodological problems.

In a review of the progress of curriculum as an area of scholarship, Giroux, Pinar and Penna (1981) outline some of the intractable problems encountered by both scholars and workers as they attempted to establish an area of study. The above writers attribute these problems to the difficulties of having to deal with a plethora of educational interests. They note that:

> ... curricularists came from every academic
> background imaginable. What they shared was an
> interest in and a responsibility for curriculum.
> ... Consequently, attempts to achieve consensus
> regarding the limits of our concerns and the methods
> by which we investigate them -- indeed, even
> consensus concerning the definition of curriculum
> itself --has been impossible to achieve (p. 2).

Thus it may be deduced that the deeper problem lay in the absence of a clear ground on which to build the sort of anchorage that would have unified the great variety of interests. Indeed it can be argued that difficulties

of instability that the field experiences today are due to the same problem.

Because of the conceptual uncertainty, some scholars have been prompted to query the intellectual validity of the field . Schwab (1970) is now famous for his searching critique of the state of the field. He declared that curriculum as a field of scholarship was moribund as it did not seem able to produce the intellectual substance and strategies to deal with the practical demands of educational thought and practice. He pointed out in summary that:

> The field has reached this unhappy state by inveterate and unexamined reliance on theory in an area where theory is partly inappropriate in the first place and where theories are extant, even where appropriate, are inadequate to the tasks which the curriculum field sets them (p. 79).

Jackson (1979) went even further to deny the existence of the curriculum field. In an address to the American Educational Research Association, he declared that curriculum, as a serious area of inquiry, could only exist as a fictitious entity in the minds of of those who claim to be curriculum scholars.

Tanner and Tanner (1981) while not contesting the validity of the field, take issue with Pinar's (1978) attempt to reconceptualise curriculum as an area of study. This reconceptualisation is based on a

chronological partition of curriculum inquiry which Pinar puts into three phases and which he labels as follows: traditionalist, with its practical, atheoretical orientation; conceptual-empiricist, dominated by social science theory and positivist methodology; and reconceptualist, which attempts to understand the curriculum domain in terms of its relationship to the wider social context and the individual consciousness. This latter conceptualisation makes generous use of the theories of mostly European scholars such as Karl Marx and Jurgen Habermas. Tanner and Tanner claim that Pinar's effort is of dubious usefulness for two reasons: a) it is based on an inadequate understanding of its putative theoretical underpinnings; and 2) it pays scant attention to empirical matters.

All of these queries reflect the uncertainties which still hamper progress in curriculum scholarship as the field searches for grounding. On the other hand, it is obvious that there is a good deal of optimism about the future of the field as can be seen in the increasing number of textbooks and journals devoted to the subject as well as the establishment of departments and courses within most university faculties of education.

This optimism is also expressed by scholars as

they continue to build their professional careers on what they consider to be curriculum study. Aoki (1980) in his concluding comments on a survey of curriculum scholarship carried out at the University of Alberta, illustrates the mood:

> Today, I no longer feel discomfited as I did
> when Bruner called for a moratorium, when
> Schwab pronounced the fact of the moribund
> state of curriculum inquiry, or when Magoon
> cried 'crisis' among educational researchers
> with whose ventures I strike a resonant
> chord (p. 17).

Klein (1986) is even more positive about the future of the curriculum field as she sees it as a necessity due to its centrality to the educational enterprise. She asserts:

> Although some scholars may debate whether
> curriculum studies exist and if so, how to
> conceptualise them, few practitoners would
> question the existence or importance of cur-
> riculum. Curriculum is the substance of
> schooling -- the primary reason why people
> attend school (p. 31).

It is significant that in spite of this confidence expressed by Klein, a large part of her discussion is taken up with the the problem of how to conceptualise the curriculum field. In fact, a perusal of the many journals and books will reveal that a significant portion of the literature has been taken up with the problem of how to conceptualise the field in such a way that it might serve as ground on which to build

programmes of inquiry. This is hardly surprising since the continued existence of any field of study or inquiry depends to a large extent on the articulation of a conceptual domain which would have the potential to generate distinctive and significant knowledge about those phenomena it purports to investigate. Within this general search for grounding there has been a number of strategies that have been used. Some of these will now be identified and discussed in terms of their usefulness to the search.

Definitions for grounding

Within the field of scholarship there is an abundant faith in the power of the definition as a device for illuminating the way into problematic areas of thought. It is not unreasonable to say that the definition is used almost instinctively by most scholars as the starting point and centre of thought and discourse. The presumption underlying this approach is that once the central object of inquiry can be identified and described in as precise a way as possible, an orderly and systematic discovery of the rest of the domain will necessarily follow. Thus it is not difficult to see why curriculum inquirers have widely adopted this device as a way into their object domain.

The strategy has been so widely used that it has resulted in a blitz of definitions appearing in the curriculum literature. Indeed it will be almost right to say that there are as many definitions as there are writers on curriculum. Thus, it has been defined as many and various things such as a course of study; all those experiences had by the learner under the auspices of the school; and so on. It would seem that each time a definition is advanced it raises new questions about the nature and meaning of curriculum, this creating the need for another definition.

The definition, as a device for furthering inquiry into the curriculum, has had little impact. The very fact that there are so many definitions purporting to portray curriculum as a concrete object, can be read as as an index of its lack of success. This performance of the definition has led certain writers to question its usefulness as a basis for inquiry.

Taylor (op. cit.) has attributed the cause of failure both to the lack of consistency in the use of the term and to a controversy over how its related semantic field should be mapped. Deers (1977) also suggests that definitions as an approach has failed because: 'Not one of these definitions has been able to command the support of theoreticians and practitioners

in the field of curriculum (p. 145)

It is significant that although many writers acknowledge the failure of definitions approach thus far, there is still an intellectual commitment to this strategy. Beers (1977), for example argues that the reason for the lack of consensus on the definition of curriculum resides in poor elucidation of the concept. He therefore attempts a rehabilitation of the strategy by a linguistic method of concept elucidation, which purports to formulate rules which specify the conditions under which particular terms, referring to curriculum are used" (p. 146).

What is missing from this discussion of the usefulness of the definition is the idea that the definition itself might have some inherent weakness which accounts for its failure. Lakoff and Johnson (1980) in a discussion of the problems of definition and understanding describe what they refer to as the 'standard view' of the definition:

> The standard view seeks to be objective, and
> it assumes that experiences and objects have
> inherent properties and that human beings un
> derstand them solely in terms of these proper
> ties. Definitions for the objectivist is a
> matter of saying what the properties are by
> giving necessary and sufficient conditions for
> the application of the concept (p. 195).

It would be reasonable to say that the standard view of

definition is the one that has been used by those who have attempted to define curriculum. In fact Deers's concept of definition is the paradigm case in point.

However, it is difficult to see how such a strategy can be applied to the understanding of the object domain of curriculum. It is axiomatic that curriculum is a social construct and in such a way the constitution of its meaning will tend to be intersubjective and heavily dependent on the social context in which it is construed. It is for this reason that notions such as 'objectivity' and 'inherent properties' will be difficult to apply to the understanding of the construct.

In addition to this, it is quite easy to find instances where the definition, largely because of its fetish for conceptual tidiness, has tended to become a literal representation of a state of affairs even though it was meant to be a provisional, tropical device. As Lakoff and Johnson (op. cit.) point out the standard definition does not account for the kind of divergent thinking that takes place when people try to understand an object domain.

> On our account, individual concepts are not
> defined in an isolated fashion, but rather
> in terms of their roles in natural kinds of
> experiences. Concepts are not defined solely
> in terms of their inherent properties; instead

they are defined primarily in terms of inter-
actional properties (p. 125).

Curriculum as a field is yet young and a more adequate understanding of its object domain would seem to require an approach to inquiry which is open-ended and which facilitates divergent thinking. One seemingly sound way of implementing such an approach is to focus on the relationships which constitute the domain of the putative object of inquiry. In such a way, it will be possible to get a better understanding by seeing how it relates directly or indirectly to ent   in its proximity.

The definitions approach aims ʋ   direct apprehension of the object of inquiry in its pure state by eliminating contextual variables. Consequently, this approach will not be adequate for the kind of open-ended inquiry required with the curriculum domain, since most consideration is given to the context of the object.

All of this is not to say that the definition has contributed nothing to the search for grounding. In fact, despite its inadequacies, a preoccupation with the question of what is to be taught is the theme which seems to be the common denominator among the many definitions that have been put forward. This clearly provides some sort of index of something important to be

explored by the inquirer into the domain.

Perspectives as Grounding

A more recent approach to grounding has been that of conceptualising the curriculum, not as a solitary object, but as a notional field constituted by certain ideas and related practices, seen through a number of philosophical perspectives. Thus , the curriculum domain is represented not as a monolithic entity, but as a field which accomodates systematic and stable variations in thought and related practices.

Eisner and Vallance (1974) illustrate this approach to curriculum inquiry by presenting a conceptualisation of the domain constituted by five 'conflicting conceptions' which they label as follows:

a) curriculum for self-actualisation;
b) curriculum for the development of cognitive processes;
c) curriculum for social reconstruction and relevance;
d) curriculum as technology;
e) curriculum as academic rationalism.

Each of these labels represents the purpose of the curriculum and provides the centre around which various writers and scholars present their ideas about curriculum. For example, those writers who advocate curriculum as technology assert that curriculum thought and practice should be taken up primarily with the task

of packaging and transmitting information to the learner as efficiently as possible. This approach is based primarily on current research on learning.

Eggleston (1975) approaches the conceptualisation he curriculum domain in a similar way by presenting a scheme consisting of two dominant perspectives - received and reflexive - which he combines into a third one which he labels as the restructuring perspective. This scheme is primarily concerned with the question of what is to be taught in schools and he feels that the curriculum will be better understood if the ideological position that informs the selection and transmission of subject matter knowledge is studied.

While the scheme put forward by Eisner and Vallance tends to be merely descriptive and deals with the practical aspects of educating, Eggleston tends to adopt a normative position and presents a manifesto for curriculum inquiry. This manifesto is captured in the following words:

> Essentially the issue to which the restruc-
> turing perpsective can address itself is a
> simple one. How may the curriculum not only
> assist a wider range of students to enhance
> their expectations of power and their capa-
> city to exercise it but also to play its part
> in bringing about a social situation in which
> these capacities and expectations may be
> used (p. 71)?

The social mission explicit in this conceptualisation of

the curriculum domain in fact raises many issues about the conduct of curriculum inquiry and this, will be dealt with later on.

The contributions of the writers discussed above represent what Schubert (1986) refers to as synoptic curriculum texts. By this he means the organisation and presentation of ideas about curriculum is such a way as to socialise educators into what their authors consider to be the more significant issues that constitute curriculum as an area of study. More specifically, work of the sort discussed above is categorised by Schubert as 'classification synopsis' to which he himself contributes a scheme of three perspectives: intellectual traditionalist, social behaviourist and experier list.

As far as curriculum inquiry is concerned, can be said that this approach has more heuristic value than the definitions approach insofar as each perspective presents the curriculum domain as being constituted by a set of relational and interactional possibilities rather than as a monolithic object stripped of its context in order to be held constant across contexts. Put in terms of the discourse by Lakoff and Johnson (op. cit.), this approach offers the curriculum domain as a 'structured gestalt'; a form of categorisation which seems to be in concert with the way

in which people normally understand the world.

> For human beings, categorisation is primarily
> a means of comprehending the world, and as
> such it must serve that purpose in a suffi-
> ciently flexible way (p. 122).

Clearly the definition is also a form of categorisation, but of a character that is not consistent with the notion of flexibility.

However, although the conceptions approach offers more flexibility and is clearly more suitable to the task of grounding curriculum inquiry, the use of categories as the basis for mapping the curriculum domain is not without its problems. There is the distinct possibility that each of these categories may become ossified as 'the representation' of the domain rather than part of that representation. The fact is that the curriculum domain, like any other social reality, is never so neatly put together, as the various perspectives suggest. Consider, for example, the scheme posited by Eisner and Vallance (op. cit.). In any curriculum situation there will be, most likely, more than one category operating at the same time and as such the inquirer who uses one perspective to approach the domain will not get an adequate picture of the domain.

This problem seems to derive in part from an inherent difficulty with the use of taxonomies: the

failure or inability to represent the conversation that takes place between the parts of the gestalt. As a result, these taxonomic schemes seem to lose their dynamic possibilities and become less useful as a guide for inquiry. The intellectual frustration that this taxonomic approach has caused within the field of educational scholarship is well documented in the futile debates over such contributions as Piaget's stages of intellectual development, Bloom's taxonomy of educational objectives, or even Gagne's conditions of learning.

Another problem that seems to be emerging with this approach being discussed is that of a proliferation of perspectives. In fact a cursory look at the curriculum literature will reveal that more and more perspectival schemes are being put forward as alternatives to those already existing. Thus the approach seems to be heading in the same direction as the definition. The main purpose of this chapter is to suggest a way out of these problems, but before this is done another approach will be discussed.

Theorising as Inquiry

There is an emergent approach to curriculum inquiry which can be regarded as a radical departure from the

two previous ones discussed. This approach advocates a distanciation from the world of curriculum practice and takes curriculum inquiry into the theoretical world of grand theorists such as Schutz, Marx, Habermas and others. Pinar (1978) who labels the scholars adopting this approach as 'reconceptualists', portrays their orientation in the following way:

> They have not (even if some of them main-
> tain they have for the time being)
> abandoned school practitioners, but fun-
> damental to their view is that an intel-
> lectual and cultural distance from our
> constituency is required for the present,
> in order to develop a comprehensive critique
> that will be of any meaningful use now or
> later (p. 6).

Thus the basic characteristic of this approach which may be referred to as a long-distance strategy.

Illustrative of this approach to curriculum inquiry is the work of Heubner (1981) in which he searches for a political economy of the curriculum by attempting to combine the work of Marx and Piaget into what he refers to as 'genetic Marxism'.

> If we can move toward this goal of a "genetic
> Marxism, then I think we can also move toward
> political economy of the curriculum' and of
> human development itself (p. 128).

Madeline Grumet adopts the same basic strateg proposing an autobiographical approach to curric inquiry. She emphasises (1981) the personal experience

as the stuff of curriculum inquiry. This experience does not really have to be located within the formal educational situation; it pervades all levels of the individual's existence.

> We live curriculum as we drive to work, take a
> a quick stop in the faculty washroom before
> class, make our way past students stuffing
> bulky coats into narrow lockers, past tiled
> walls and display cases into the room where
> the curriculum we describe is or is not
> experienced (p. 140).

Thus the curriculum domain becomes inseparably fused into the totality of life where the emphasis is not on the domain but on the dialectic between the lived experience and the succesive attempts to describe that experience.

Aoki (1981) also attempts to conceptualise curriculum in the same vein. Expressing a discontent with former approaches, he advocates a strategy for inquiry which is centred on the man-world relationship. The basis of his objection to other strategies is that they are:

> .,.. not providing sufficient scope and contex-
> tuality that allow entertainment of views of
> human and social acts we call 'education'(p. 6).

He goes on to suggest that inquiry into the man-world relationship be carried out within the framework of Habermas's theory of Knowledge and human interest.

A cross-sectional view of the literature dealing

with this form of inquiry shows a variegation of philosophical positions , each attempting to illuminate the curriculum domain by a sort of telescopic method. Apart from the flight away from the practical into the .theoretical realm (Vallance, 1982), the only common ground under these positions is the rejection of the positivist approach to inquiry.

It is significant that some prominent curriculum scholars consider this diversity a good thing for the curriculum field (Walker, 1982; Pinar, 1981) since, they think, that a synthesis will eventually emerge from this profusion of thought which will make the curriculum all the richer. What seems to underlie this thinking is a laissez-faire philosophy which is expressed in a more-is-better approach and which, of course, is not questioned.

Now, the very notion of a field of inquiry involves the generation of intersubjective meanings which tend towards consensus on, at least, some putative object of inquiry. It may be argued, therefore, that this variegation of thought can be counterproductive in that there may be epistemological limits to the diversity that the field can tolerate. If this limit is surpassed then the curriculum field may become something else.

This is not to say that divergent thinking is

unhealthy; but the prerequisite condition for divergence is a point of departure on which there is consensus - even if provisional - among those who work in the field. It is clear that the present direction of this latter group of inquirers is away from consensus (and this is not a concern of theirs) and also from any sort of grounding within the field.

However, their contribution to the search for anchorage is to signal the importance of theoretical considerations as a necessary complement to the practical orientation which curriculum must necessarily have since it must be grounded in activities that take place in the educational sphere.

Proposed Grounding for Inquiry

Implicit in the foregoing discussion of the various approaches to curriculum inquiry is the view that each one is, to a greater or lesser extent, unsatisfactory as a conceptual anchor for the journey into the domain. An attempt will now be made to go beyond these approaches in an effort to develop a scheme that will be more satisfactory. But before this is done it will be useful to articulate some principles which will serve as the basis for the proposed scheme.

Principles for Grounding

A principle held to be of prime importance is that inquiry ought to be grounded in objects and events that are located in the educational domain. This point is being made in the context of the diminishing integrity of educational inquiry. The current situation seems to be that educational inquiry has lost much of its essence to those disciplines, outside the field, which were intended to provide only insight into the problem within the domain. The result is that education has now become colonised by these disciplines. Pinar (1981) makes the point thusly:

> By 1978 it is accurate to note that the educational field has lost whatever (and it was never complete, of course) intellectual autonomy it possessed in earlier years and now is nearly tantamount to a colony of superior, imperialistic powers(p. 91).

It is interesting to note that Pinar is commenting on the hegemonic effect of the psychologist and other social scientists (whom he refers to as conceptual-empiricists) on curriculum inquiry. Now Pinar, in calling for a movement away from the dominance of these social scientists, sees as an alternative that group of scholars whom he calls reconceptualists. The approach of this group has been discussed and, in view of what has been said, it is reasonable to ask if curriculum inquiry

will be taken by the reconceptualists into the unhappy state of neocolonialism. Given their commitment to distanciation from the curriculum domain, the reconceptualists may easily become absentee landlords of curriculum inquiry.

Nevertheless, Pinar's point about the colonisation of curriculum inquiry does have some validity. For, in the universities, faculties of education do not really undertake educational studies, but, rather, sociology of education, educational administration, and so on. Thus educational studies is not an integral object but an aggregate of these branches which are necessarily shaped by their parent disciplines.

Education being an applied field, (in the traditional sense) has a practical orientation and as such it will tend to make use of any intellectual resource that has the potential to contribute to the solution of its diverse problems. Consequently, there is no question of the legitimacy of various subfields within. The problem arises only when the relationship of educational inquiry to those parent disciplines outside the field becomes inverted and education becomes nothing more than an area of interest to disciplines such as history or sociology.

Curriculum as a subfield within educational inquiry

should not be so susceptible to colonisation seeing that
it is not related to any discipline external to the
educational domain. Thus, it can lay claim to being the
only subfield that is intrinsically educational and as
such its integrity will be preserved by grounding
inquiry in educational objects and events.

Another basic principle has to do with the nature
of flexibility and the related one of open endedness.
Now, the primary purpose of grounding is to develop
structures of understanding with which to approach the
initial encounter with an object domain. However,
because of the uncertainties of social reality, these
structures cannot be regarded as set theoretical
categories, simply because they cannot respond to the
dynamism inherent in the social situation (Lakoff and
Johnson, op. cit. p.22). Instead it is more plausible to
approach inquiry with frames of understanding that have
the flexibilty and scope to respond to the dynamism of
the putative object domain as relationships evolve. Such
a strategy seems to be eminently applicable to
curriculum inquiry seeing that there is still so much
tentativeness about its object domain.

Proposing Grounding

The question of what is learnt and taught in formal
educational situations seems to be a common concern of

the different approaches to curriculum inquiry (at leas

of the conceptions and definitions approach). Further,

most curriculum textbooks acknowledge this to be the

core of the curriculum domain (Stenhouse, 1975; Zais,

1976; and McNeil, 1981 for example).

In addition to all this, there is the powerful

commonsense notion that schools are set up with the

primary purpose of transmitting 'something' to those who

attend them; and this 'something' can be the secrets of

everlasting life, the doctrines of Marx or any such

information that is organised for the purpose of

transmission.

This notion seems to hold good even in the face of

the frequently expressed tenet that "We teach children

not subjects". Such an idea seems, at best, to be a

silly half-truth since the idea of teaching without

teaching something is not at all intelligible. In fact

teachers are employed because they are considered to

have something to pass on to their students.

Given this prominent position of content (which

henceforth shall refer to bodies of knowledge organised

for teaching in the formal education situation) in the

educational scheme of things it would not be

unreasonable to locate it at the centre of the grounding

for curriculum inquiry. Also, it seems to be an educational object 'par excellence', simply because it is the organising constant in any educational situation. This latter point speaks to the previously expressed concern about the integrity of educational inquiry as a result of the grounding of this inquiry in external conceptual domains.

However, even if content is located at the centre of the curriculum domain, this is not sufficient for grounding inquiry because, in keeping with the notion of the structured gestalt discussed earlier on, there is the need to map out, at least tentatively, the interactional field of relationships around content. The strategy for such mapping will be, simply, to identify certain commonplace categories that can be seen as constitutive of the educational situation. Below is a representation of this interactional field

Figure 1. Outline of the Curriculum Domain

SOCIAL MATRIX

STUDENT

ARTIFACTS

SOCIAL MATRIX

SOCIAL MATRIX

NTENT

EDUCATIONAL SITUATION

TEACHER

SOCIAL MATRIX
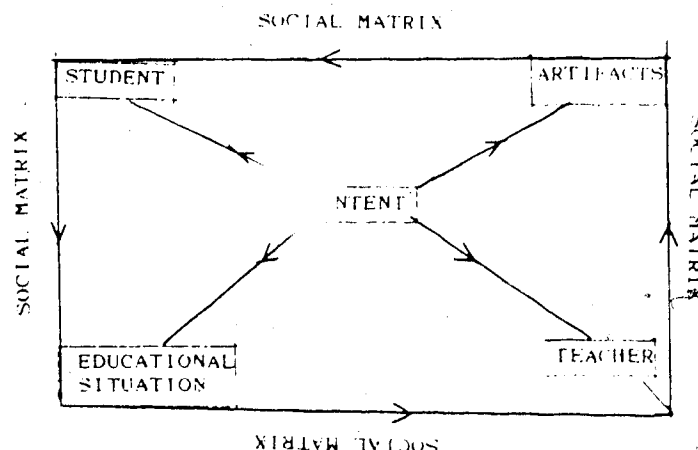
The representation above represents a field of relationships in which all the categories have interaction with each other because of their relationship to content.

It is likely that each category will have relationships with others in the educational situation. For example, a teacher means different things for an educational administrator than s/he does for a curriculum worker. Teacher becomes a part of the curriculum domain because of the relationship to content.

It will also be observed that the whole interactive field is subsumed by the social matrix. This is based on the axiomatic that curriculum is a social phenomenon and as such created and located within a social context. Consequently, it will not be conceived as a mere backdrop, but as an active category having a conversation with the others.

For a further fleshing out of this interactive field, it will be in order to identify some possible constitutive properties of each one. These appear below.

Table 1. Constituents of Curriculum Domain

Social Matrix	Artifacts	Content
Values	Textbooks	Traditional Disciplines
Power Systems	Instructional Media	Skills
Stratification	Technology	Commonsense Knowledge
Knowledge Stock	Delivery Rationality	Everyday Experiences
Educational Aims		

....

Student	Teacher	Educational Situation
Values	Values	Administration System
Social Background	Knowledge	Climate
Expectations	Action Systems	Values Systems
Cognitive Make-up	Social Experience	Social Location
Prior Experiences		Physical Facilities

The list under each category is not exhaustive and the possibilities can hardly be charted at this stage. However, each one consists of relatively commonplace items which can create the gestalt necessary for a further step into inquiry.

This interactional field presented is to some extent similar to those in the conceptions approach discussed earlier, but there is quite a difference in that the scheme proposed for grounding avoids the problems inherent in the taxonomical approach by opting for broad commonplace categories which are clearly open-

ended but having enough structuring to ensure an orderly approach to the curriculum domain.

However, in order to achieve this, it becomes necessary to deal more elaborately with that category of content which has been located at the hub of the domain. Consequently, the next chapter will address a number of curricular positions which locates content at the centre of the domain. These positions will be examined in order to ascertain their usefulness in articulating more clearly the manner in which content as a category generates the interactions which make up the curriculum domain.

Chapter 3
Content and Curriculum Inquiry

From the discussion in the previous chapter, it would seem that content may be justifiably located at the centre of a field of interactions which are held to constitute the curriculum domain. Despite the clear position of prominence that content holds in the educational scheme of things, it has not been accorded a corresponding amount of attention among those who inquire into the processes of education and schooling.

Zais (1976) in making the case for the focus on content suggests that educational researchers have, for a long time, either ignored the issue or taken it for granted. Young (1971) has also argued that sociologists of education have tended to focus on matters such as the wastage of talent and the relationship between social class and achievement, while taking the content of schooling as a 'given'.

Generally, the neglect of content within educational inquiry can be attributed, in large part, to the dominance of the psychological discourse on thought and practice within the field. This can be readily seen in the explicitly psychologistic nature of much of the recent inquiry into education. The pervasiveness of

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psychological constructs within educational discourse is also testimony to this dominance. Indeed, without the many constructs such as attitude, motivation and behavioural objectives, this discourse would become quite impoverished.

Now, it is rather evident that those psychologists interested in education are primarily concerned with how people learn rather than what they learn. Consequently their inquiry has tended not to pay attention to the question of content. Jerome Bruner (1974), himself an eminent educational psychologist, speaks eloquently about this neglect of content when he says:

> Psychologists have too easily assumed that
> learning is learning is learning --- that
> the earlier version of what was taught did
> not matter much, one thing being much like
> another and reducible to a pattern of asso-
> ciation, to stimulus-response connections,
> or to our favourite molecular componentry
> (p. 71).

Bruner's comment is part of a more general advocacy for the structuring of content according to psychological principles in order to enhance instruction. But the neglect of content by the psychologist is somewhat curious since an account of how people learn cannot be adequate if the substance which makes the process possible in the first place, is not taken into

consideration. This is especially true in the educational situation where the transmission of content is a primary objective.

In a more fundamental way, this failure to focus on content is a clear example of what happens when educational inquiry is grounded externally. Indeed, if the inquiry had been grounded in the educational domain, the question of content would have been inescapable, because of its centrality in the domain.

All of this is not to say that considerations on content have been totally absent from educational inquiry in recent times. On the contrary, there has been a number of contemporary educationalists who have taken the problem rather seriously to the point where a significant discourse is developing alongside the mainstream of inquiry. These writers, although approaching the question from varied perspectives are all preoccupied with the practical problem of what is or ought to be taught to those who are called students.

Some of the contributions to this discourse will now be discussed in terms of their potential for fleshing out the interactional sch e that was posited as a provisional grounding on which inquiry will proceed. Within the relevant literature there can be identified three clear perspectives: philosophical, sociological,

and empirical and the discussion will therefore proceed within the framework of these categories.

Philosophical Perspective

The contributions under this perspective approach the question of curriculum content from the standpoint of the nature of the knowledge that was taught. It was felt that good curricular practices rested on a selection of content based on the nature of knowledge, from the point of view of its immanent properties. Once this was done then all aspects of the business would become easier to negotiate. As an illustration of this particular approach to curriculum thought and practice the work of two philosophers of education, Paul Hirst and Phillip Phenix, will now be discussed.

Paul Hirst

Paul Hirst, is a British philosopher who has contributed much to curriculum inquiry through his work on the conceptual analysis of educational thought and practice, especially in the area of curriculum content. His more outstanding contribution on the question was developed at a time when the British society grappled with certain curricular problems arising from the establishment of universal secondary education and the early specialisation that took place in the traditional grammar school situation. As a result, this contribution

(1971) was taken up with the practical task of outlining a theory of curriculum, based on the nature of knowledge, which was intended to address these two problems.

Hirst's thesis is based on the major premise that education has to do primarily with the development of mind. As he puts it:

> The objectives of education are surely certain
> developments of the pupil which are achieved
> in learning, and I suggest that these are all ·
> connected with the development of a rational
> mind (p. 238).

He goes further to say that it is demonstrable that the development of the human mind has always been marked by the "progressive differentiation in human consciousness of some seven or eight distinguishable cognitive structures"(p.238) and these can be located in a limited number of domains which he refers to as forms of knowledge. These forms are, according to Hirst, the physical sciences, mathematics, the human sciences and history, literature and the fine arts, morals, religion and philosophy. Hirst goes on to show that each of these forms is distinctive and not reducible to any other because:

1. it is constituted by concepts peculiar to itself;

2. it has a unique way in which the concepts are
    interrelated;

3.   it has peculiar truth tests for validating the knowledge within the form.

Hirst also posits the notion of a field of knowledge which is an area that consists of the combined knowledge from more than one form. Examples of fields of knowledge are engineering, geography or medicine.

Derived from all of this is Hirst's proposal of a general education in which students will be exposed to the fundamental principles of each one of the forms of knowledge. / An omission of any one of these forms will mean a less than adequate education for the student.

The above is a rather sketchy representation of Hirst's rather intricate ideas but it serves to reveal his basic notion about the role of content in curriculum practice. Now, there have been numerous criticisms of this theory of curriculum and a few will be mentioned after a brief consideration of another philosopher of education of a similar persuasion.

Phillip Phenix

Phillip Phenix(1964), an American philosopher of education also put forward a scheme for general education based on the demarcation of human knowledge . However, it was based on principles that were quite different from those put forward by Hirst. His scheme

was based on the innate capacity of humans to experience

meanings in distinct realms of existence. He asserts:

> Human beings are essentially creatures who
> have the power to experience meanings.
> Distinctively human existence consists in
> a pattern of meanings. Furthermore, gene-
> ral education is the process of engendering
> essential meanings (p. 166).

Phenix consequently arrives at six realms of meanings on

which the content of curriculum should be based:

symbolics, ,empirics, esthetics, synoetics, ethics and.

synoptics.

Hirst and Phenix are just two representatives among

those who advocate a curriculum based on the nature of

knowledge. Schwab (1981) is of the view that the content

of the curriculuum should be organised in such a way as

to make the structure of the disciplines apparent to

students. Using almost the same criteria as Hirst he

articulates the structure of knowledge by dealing with

the number of disciplines, their conceptual structures

and their methods of inquiry.

More recently, Eisner (1984) has put forward a case

for the selection of certain types of curriculum content

as a response to the 'back to the basics' movement in

education in the U.S.A. He argues that education for

young people entirely based on traditional notions of

literacy and numeracy are inadequate for the overall

development of their consciousness because it has omitted education in averbal forms such as art.

Critique of the Philosophical Perspective

Among all of these approaches, there are some common features to be noted. Firstly, there is the establishment of a necessary link between knowledge and human consciousness which is in turn translated into curriculum proposals based on this link. Thus the human mind can only develop if it is exposed to certain prescribed types of knowledge. But as an anterior condition to this proposition there is the idea that knowledge can take only certain forms because the nature off human experience is predetermined in certain ways. Phenix claims that this predetermination is attributable to some innate properties of the mind while Hirst is not so explicit although his arguments seem to suggest some metaphysical machinations of culture.

Secondly, there is the conviction among these philosophers that human knowledge is clearly demarcated and that curriculum content should, therefore, be organised and presented in such a manner. What is curious about the various mappings of knowledge is that they always tend to coincide with that organisation that has been traditionally called the disciplines of

Knowledge.

It is for this reason that it can be argued that these accounts of human knowledge are somewhat inadequate because they have either ignored the social ramifications or taken it for granted. This is all the more obvious when it is remembered that the proposed aim of education underlying the curriculum based on the nature of Knowledge, is to initiate the student into the existent significant cultural forms.

It is from this particular weakness that a number of valid objections to the proposal has sprung, even those which purport to be based on philosophical grounds. Pring (1976), a philosopher, has tried to show that there is no logical reason against the proliferation of forms depending on the choice of paradigms. This criticism is based on the notion that Hirst has not worked out sound 'a priori' principles on which to ground his theory.

One consequence of this is the exclusive preoccupation with propositional knowledge in his scheme while ignoring practical knowledge. In the same vein, Lawton (1975) and Barrow (1984) have faulted Hirst on his failure to be definitive about the number of forms, since he has arrived at two different numbers on different occasions.

It can be seen here in all of these criticisms and objections that the underlying problem springs from the question of who should decide which complex of knowledge should be regarded as a form. This has, fundamentally, to do with the sociogenesis of knowledge and the way in which decisions have been made about what should be the basis of the forms. Despite the failure of the philosophers to deal with the social ramifications of the demarcation of knowledge, there are some aspects o their contribution which seem to have heuristic potential for the task of grounding inquiry

The Philosophical Perspective and Grounding

Firstly, they have suggested a reciprocal relationship between knowledge and the human mind, an issue that the psychologists have ignored, and have at least charted the ways in which the interaction could take place. This seems to be consistent with the schema for inquiry since it posits the possibility for interaction between at least two categories of the scheme - content and student - thereby opening a direction for asking questions about this interaction.

Secondly, the philosophers have focussed on the question of the demarcation of knowledge with the attendent problem of how each category within this

mapping may be constituted. This suggests that in any consideration of the role of content in the curriculum domain the question of its constitution (content) should be bracketed in order to ensure an adequate understanding of this role. This is not to say that the the criticisms of the demarcation are not valid, but what is more important is that some form of demarcation exists. This can be clearly seen at the level of schooling where everything seems to be organised around the notion that knowledge to be transmitted falls naturally into distinct categories. Musgrave (1973) also sees the importance of the demarcation when he asserts that "to a sociologist the acceptance of Hirst's forms is irrelevant since what matters is that 'disciplines' or 'subjects' exist" (p. 8).

Finally, even if by omission, the philosophical discourse has drawn attention to the importance of considering the social matrix for an adequate understanding of content. This concern has been approached by the sociologist and we now turn to an examination of the sociological perspective on content.

Sociological Perspective

The sociological perspective to be discussed has been derived from the discourse of a group of

sociologists, concerned about the staus of the sociology of education. These sociologist felt that this subarea of educational studies no longer make a significant contribution to educational inquiry because of its neglect of the question of curriculum content.

In a volume which appeared in Britain a little over a decade ago (Young, 1971), these concerned sociologists attempted to chart a new direction for sociological inquiry into education by problematising the question of what was taught in schools. Their general thesis goes as follows: the basis for social interaction is a stock of knowledge to which members must have access if they are to survive as group members. This knowledge is socially constructed and as such it will reflect the characteristic of the society in which it is created or used. Consequently, school knowledge which is derived from this stock needs to be problematised and not taken for granted, in order to understand the effects of the wider society on the processes of schooling. The motive idea behind this commitment to the study of curriculum content was that a society tends to reproduce itself through the use of certain structures and as such the process is going to be effected through the use of power and control by those groups within the society who happen be interested in this reproductive process.

Young (1971), one of the chief advocates of this approach to educational inquiry, articulated a theoretical position which can form the substance of a theory of curriculum practice. Moving from the basic idea of the social construction of knowledge, Young advances the argument that the various types of content which make up school knowledge are subject to a preference system in which certain types of content will be more valued than others to reflect the stratification system of the wider society. In such a way these contents will be considered as either high- or low-status.

From this basic position, Young sees the emergence of a most important question which would set the stage for inquiry: how far and by what criteria are the different areas of knowledge stratified? This question becomes important because it can generate practical issues for inquiry. As he says:

> We are led to consider the social basis of the
> different kinds of knowledge and we begin to
> raise questions about the relationship between
> the power structure and the curriculum, the
> access to knowledge and the opportunities to
> legitimise it as 'superior' and the relation-
> ship between knowledge and its functions in
> different kinds of society (p. 47).

Young goes further to suggest some of the possible relationships that exist within the curriculum domain

due to the idea that knowledge is stratified. For example he suggests that since knowledge is stratified and this principle is accepted as legitimate within the educational institution, then teachers will be more committed to those areas of the curriculum that are formally assessed and taught to the ablest children. Also he suggests that high status knowledge will have the following characteristics:

a) an emphasis on written as opposed to oral presentation;
b) an emphasis on individual rather than group work;
c) unrelated to everyday life and common experiences;
d) abstract and structured independently of the learner.

It can be presumed that low-status subjects will tend to have characteristics opposite those above.

Young has therefore put forward some very practical ideas about content and its role in the curriculum and although what has been represented here is a necessarily partial sketch it does appear to suggest a scheme with many interactional possibilities .

Bernstein (1971) using the same basic assumptions about power and control as Young, has advanced a theory about curriculum content that is more complete. His motif is expressed in the folowing way:

> How a society selects, classifies, transmits
> and evaluates the educational knowledge
> it considers to be public, reflects both the
> distribution of power and the principles of
> social control (p. 47).

Based on this basic idea he articulates a theory of how knowledge/content shapes the entire curriculum domain which is constituted by three message systems generated by this content.

The three systems are: a) <u>curriculum</u> which defines what counts as valid knowledge; b) <u>pedagogy</u> which defines what counts as a valid transmission of knowledge; and c) <u>evaluation</u> which defines what counts as a valid realisation of knowledge on the part of the taught (p. 47). Underlying these message systems are two codes which Bernstein labels as collected' and 'integrated'. The former is that knowledge complex (constituted by the content of curriculum) in which the different types of content tend to be clearly demarcated and kept separate from each other. Within the integrated code there is more openness between the different types of content and there is more intercourse between them.

Bernstein also posits the corresponding concepts of 'classification' and 'framing' which are defined by a weak/strong polarity. 'Classification' refers to the strength of the boundaries between content areas. Thus when an area is strongly classified there are powerful

mechanisms operating to keep it separate from other areas, while weakly classified areas tend not to have those barriers. 'Framing' refers to the degree of control that either the teacher or student has over the transmission of the content (in terms of pacing, sequencing, etc.). The more control the teacher has, the stronger is the framing while greater control by students makes for weaker framing.

Again, what has been presented is a partial sketch of Bernstein's theory. However, it is clear that at face value both this theory and Young's combine to suggest a possible picture of the curriculum domain, (centred on content) that is pregnant with interactional possibilities and which seems to be quite adequate for fleshing out the schematic traced in the previous chapter. The generator of these possibilities resides in the notion that curriculum content is a social construct created to serve certain social purposes and as such it immediately raises questions about human motives and the way these motives are played out in the educational realm. Indeed the thesis affords a view of each category as constituted by properties which can generate a whole range of interactions within and between itself and others. The presumption he of course, is that a greater range of interactional possibilities affords the

opening up of more issues, thereby strengthening the ground on which inquiry is to proceed.

To illustrate, consider the following situation: if a particular type of content has been selected and validated as worthwhile by the society to be taught in schools, then teachers will be socialised into the knowledge and the related social interests thereby causing some identity formation; the teacher then interacts with students whose social perceptions of the content will affect the interaction between them and the teachers as the former try to learn and the latter try to transmit the content; this interaction is in turn constrained by certain factors operating within the school environment such as the availability of time and other resources. Thus, all of the categories of the domain are brought into the interaction and permit the posing of the kinds of questions on which inquiry can proceed.

Critique of the Sociological Perspective

It is arguable that Young and Bernstein have provided such a useful approach because they have based all considerations on the assumption of the determining influence of the social matrix. It should be noted here that the philosophers have problematised content as well,

but they have concentrated on its immanent nature, rather than on the way it relates to the social questions of power and control.

However, it is this particular strategy of postulating that what is taught in schools is socially determined that has attracted the strongest objections to the whole thesis. For although most observers agree that the thesis has significant heuristic potential, some concerns have been expressed about the way power and control have been treated.

The most salient of these concerns has been about the question of human agency. The related contention is that, even though mechanisms for control are present in curriculum content , the meanings through which they are expressed are still subject to the interpretation and acceptance by those for whom they are intended. Consequently, there is the possibility that the target subjects will resist the intended meanings, which cause outcomes different from those originally intended. In commenting on Bernstein's work Giroux notes that:

> While he points to the importance of a semiotic reading of the structural features that shape knowledge, classroom social relationships, and organisational structures in the day-to-day functioning of schools, he does so at the expense of analysing the lived experiences of the actors themselves. That is, Bernstein ignores how

> different classes of students, teachers, and
> other educational workers give meaning to the codes
> that influence their daily experiences (p. 410-411).

Giroux goes on to say that by ignoring the production of

meaning and the content of school cultures, Bernstein

presents a "weak and one-sided notion of consciousness

and human action"; one-sided' insofar as everything in

the educational situation follows the predetermined path

charted by the pre-existing' structures of power and

control. As a corrective to this weakness in Bernstein's

theory, Giroux (1983) posits the notion of 'resistance'

based on the idea that :

> ... the mechanisms of social and
> cultural reproduction are never complete and
> are always faced with partially realized ele-
> ments of opposition (p.).

Such a criticism of Bernstein is reasonable because

he has somehow failed to take into account the

interaction between the broad social structures and the

related micro-situations which operate at the level of

schooling. To use Giroux's terminology, he failed to

develop a dialectical model of reproduction which would

account for the individual's efforts at self-formation

over and against the determinism of social structures.

It can also be argued that for this reason

Bernstein has not adequately dealt with the nature of

the contents that are presumed to make possible the

interactions within the curriculum domain. He tends to see them as constants which remain the same across all educational situations. Thus he fails to consider how perceptions of the immanent nature of these contents can vary from time to time and situation to situation. Goodson (1984) in arguing for an historical approach to the study of school subjects criticizes Bernstein for this same weakness of taking content as monolithic, which according to him is not "a promising starting point from which to develop the theme that curriculum is subject to patterns of control by dominant interest groups" (p. 37). Burgess (1984) also adds to the criticism on this view of content by claiming that the thesis has concentrated only on those contents that are highly visible in the curriculum situation - 'subject disciplines'.

The Sociological Perspective and Grounding

In sum, all of these concerns about the thesis on curriculum content point to a weakness that is derived from theoretically constructed notions about the relationship of knowledge to power which lack substantiation in the world of people and practice. Goodson (1984) makes the point bluntly by a quotation from one of his unpublished pieces:

> ... to seek to provide from the macro-
> level theories of curriculum without empirical
> investigation or understanding of how the
> the curriculum has been negotiated at the micro-
> level over time is a poor sequence through which to
> to proceed to theory (1984, p. 37).

All of the above objections to Bernstein's theory are not

inappropriate and they do suggest ways in which the

thesis may be improved. However, they do not detract

from the basic substantive idea about the relationship

of curriculum content power structures of the society.

For it seem almost ax matic society

characteristically attempts to reproduce f; whether

this intent is achieved is another matter to be

corroborated by empirical inquiry (something from which

theories of resistance are also not exempt). Thus we now

turn to a discussion of the empirical perspective on

curriculum content.

Empirical Perspectives

Since the appearance of the proposals by Bernstein

and his colleagues for a new sociology of education

based on the problematising of content, a great deal of

discussion has been generated at the theoretical level,

but empirical inquiry based on these ideas has not been

of significant proportions (Anyon, 1981). The work of

Anyon (1981), and Shepherd and Vulliamy (1983) are two

of the few investigations which have been done in direct

response to the hypothesis put forward by Young and his colleagues.

Anyon's work was done in five schools in two school districts of New Jersey, USA. On the basis of certain economic factors, she allocated the schools to contrasting social class contexts and investigated the perceptions of students and other school personnel relative to the nature and transmission of the common content prescribed by the school board. She also observed the classroom interactions generated by the teaching of the content.

Anyon found that similar curriculum contents were perceived and negotiated differently by teachers and students, depending on the social class context in which they were located. Thus the evidence suggested to her that the curriculum contents were congruent with the reproductive motives of the wider society. However, Anyon also found that within this content domain there were 'reproductive' elements, indicative of the possibilities of transformation within the social system.

Shepherd and Vulliamy (1983) also had similar findings from a study of the music curriculum of the high school system of Toronto. They found that the content and its delivery attempted to socialise students

into the traditional conception of music as a notation sytem over and above the more popular idea that music is largely a matter of tone and functionality and linked with day-to-day experience. According to these two writers, the former type of music reflects the rigid hierarchy and authority structure of industrial capitalist society. The investigators did find that this dominant view of school music was challenged by the alternative one within the classroom situation, but unlike Anyon's more optimistic finding, the challenge was diffused:

> ... when the radical potential of an oral aural music is diffused in the classroom by a notational filter derived from functionality, the students are not only socialised into a dominant musical ideology, but they are also socialised into fundamental epistemological assumptions underpinning industrialist, capitalist society (p. 10).

This study also served as a point of comparison with another one carried out in Britain (Shepherd, 1977) and it is significant that the evidence pointed to the same fundamental things.

Apart from this type of inquiry which seeks to examine, in a direct way, the social determination of curriculum content, there has been another stream carried by British investigators using the interactionist approach. A significant point about this

stream of inquiry is that, though use has been made of the notions of power and control, the focus of investigations has not been on curriculum content but, rather, on the more general one of schooling.

Consequently, the general theoretical motive has been to find out whether and to what extent the education system is reproductive through the gamut of interactions that take place within it. It must also be pointed out that the notion of resistance to dominating structures is also the prime motif in this type research. In fact, the consideration of these structures merely serves as a frame for their own self-disconfirmation. As such, this inquiry cannot be called curricular in the strict sense since it does not focus on the knowledge/content problematic originally posed by the new sociologists.

In spite of the deflection from the original problematic of the relationship of curriculum content to the wider social matrix some of the interactionist studies have focussed specifically on content. Burgess (1984) has investigated the perceptions of teachers and students in respect of certain unconventional and non-examinable subjects in a comprehensive school. He found that both groups considered the subjects as inferior to the more established examinable subjects and as such

accorded little or no importance to them.

In sum, Burgess found that each of the subjects was perceived to have the following characteristics:

1. it was a non-subject with little subject knowledge;
2. teaching methods were claimed by pupils to be unconventional;
3. teachers adopted different standards concerning curriculum and discipline;
4. there were no opportunites to take the public examination that would provide qualifications in the subject (p.197).

Measor (1984) also found that students' perceptions and evaluations of the different subjects determined the classroom interaction that took place while they were being taught: deviant, hostile behaviour was associated with the less preferred subjects while an opposite attitude was adopted for the more favoured ones. In the summary section of the article, Measor asserts that:

> The assumption at the base of this paper is that pupils in schools have two sorts of concerns and pressures upon them: the formal demands of the institution and the informal interests of adolescent cultures within the school. The assumption is that the two areas are opposed, and that pupils have to juggle the two against each other (p. 216).

It can be clearly seen that the emphasis is on the interactional situation with hardly any explanatory reference to the workings of the social structure. In fact, the emphasis seems to be on describing the interaction rather than grounding the events in a

broader explanatory framework. Thus this stream of inquiry has moved from the extreme of·structure without substance to that of substance without form.

Giroux (1981) points out that this approach to inquiry is one-sided in that it only deals with 'oppressed' subcultures which are presumed to be the only sites for resistance to controlling structures.In a later article (1983) he goes further to show how, by conceptualising human agency only in terms of resistance, the inquirers have ignored some of the more important aspects of the problem such as: a) the tactical decision not to oppose the dominating structures in an overt way; b) the failure to account for gender and race in inquiry; and c) the use by schools of other repressive to support the ideological domination they attempt to impose. As an alternative to this kind of inquiry Giroux calls for one which would lead to a critical pedagogy:

> ... the current use of the concept of resistance by radical educators suggests a lack of intellec-tual rigor and an overdose of theoretical sloppi-ness. It is imperative that educators be more pre-cise about what resistance actually is and what it is not.... (p. 289).

A cursory glance at the plethora of ethnographic inquiry done by the investigators discussed above will show that Giroux's criticisms are more or less defensible. Indeed, there does not seem to be any firm position emerging

from the amorphous mass of evidence that has been accumulated.

As far as the heuristic value of this approach is concerned, it can be said that it attempted to do what the new sociologists neglected - to explore the nature of human action 'vis-a-vis' the controlling structures of the society but as was said before they seem to have gone to another extreme. Additionally, one may question the appropriateness of this particular type of inquiry since it does not treat content in a direct way. Indeed curriculum content predates the lived experience of the classroom situation and as such must be bracketed since it is the possibility condition for this experience and as such any study of the curriculum domain that minimises its importance cannot lay claim to adequacy.

Content and Curriculum Inquiry

Given the discussions on the three perspectives on curriculum content it is now in order to see what kind of insights can be derived from them in order to articulate more clearly how the proposed scheme, with content at its centre, can be 'developed to provide grounding for curriculum inquiry.

One of the principal insights that emerges is that

content needs to be considered from the point of view of its immanent nature. Despite the conservativism and the social naivete of the philosophical perspective, it has focussed attention on the matter of the internal structure of contents whether it be drawn from the disciplines or negotiated into being as a result of conflict. The point is whatever its origin curriculum content cannot be properly understood outside of the consideration of its substantive properties.

Bruner (1974) has cited both the explosion and the implosion of knowledge as twin causes of the problem of deciding what to teach. This is easily seen today in most societies where the continuous reciprocal interacation between the human mind and the external world causes continual revisions in the existing schemes of knowledge. This particular phenomenon is expressed in the school by the deletion or addition of certain contents; or the integration of certain forms of knowledge to strengthen or make more relevant what is taught. This is the kind of scenario against which Bernstein introduces the possibility of a movement away from collected towards integrated codes of knowledge as the dominant mode of expresssing curriculum content (1971: 66-77).

Consequently, if content is to be properly

understood as the centre of the curriculum domain, it becomes necessary to examine not only the social negotiations generating the transformations in knowledge but also the substantive nature of the transformations themselves. The philosophical perspective seems to offer the soundest basis for undertaking this examination, insofar as they have developed specific constructs for conceptualising and describing the substantive nature of content; and although they have only dealt with the traditional disciplines, the constructs can be applied to any other kind of content.

For example, Hirst's notion of fields and forms can be applied to those contents attempting to become part of school knowledge. In this case it can be seen whether or not they are, in fact expressions of one or more disciplines(fields); or whether they have merely evolved from a particular form. All of this may be found out by examining the fundamental concepts that constitute the content, the mode of enquiry it uses and the public criteria used to evaluate its truth statements.

This kind of analysis of contents becomes all the more important when it is considered that the constitution of content is prior to social negotiations about its worth simply because negotiations cannot take place in the absence of an object of negotiation. This

is one of the problems inherent in the thesis about knowledge since it takes the constitutive nature of the different contents for granted.

The major contribution of the sociological perspective to the search for grounding is clearly the theory about the social determination of knowledge and the kinds of relations and interactions that flow from the principles of power and control which underlie the selection, distribution and transmission of knowledge as curriculum content. Such a perspective must be a logical extension of the axiomatic that curriculum domain is essentially a social entity. But more than that the sociological perspective has offered clearly articulated paths of interaction which can go a far distance towards an adequate conceptualisation of the domain which can serve as a point of departure for inquiry. Notions such as high- and low-status knowledge and their corresponding treatment as curriculum content, suggest a range of possible interactions which can involve, at one fell swoop, all the elements of the schematic proposed in the previous chapter social matrix, content, teacher, student and artifacts.

Both the philosophical and the empirical perspectives in some ways suggest correctives to the weaknesses: the consideration of the immanent nature of

content and the fate of socially structured content in the actual world, respectively. However, each of these two perspectives by itself or combined cannot provide the explanatory power of the sociological perspective. Thus, it can be said in summary that the sociological perspective along with the correctives provided by the other two approaches offers clear guidelines as to how the schematic may be fleshed out to provide the ground for inquiry.

Content, Interaction and Meaning

It cannot be doubted that much of the progress made so far has been due largely to the fundamental proposition that the curriculum domain is a social entity. Another seminal idea is that the domain is constituted by a set of interactions between certain basic categories: social matrix, teacher, student, the educational environment and artifacts, all interacting around the hub of content. It is now necessary to go one step further to deal in a more elaborate way with the notion of interactions since they have been merely charted during the foregoing discussions.

If the curriculum domain is to be conceived as an interactional field, then it must be seen as constituted by a set of exchanges between the foundational categories

initiated by some dynamic operating within content. Thus the considerations would move from the categories themselves to the kinds of mediational devices that are employed to make the exchanges possible. To illustrate this by a question: Given a certain type of content, what kind of messages does it convey to the teacher to condition the way that s/he interacts with the student? Of course, the interaction may also be seen from the point of view of the student, but what is important is the fact that the content is presented to the individual who derives some meaning from it and this in turn causes interactions.

Taken this way, the investigation into the curriculum domain becomes largely an inquiry into meanings - how they are presented, interpreted and expressed. The study of meaning is beginning to be dominated by a field of inquiry known as semiotics (or semiology as it is called in Europe) which purports to be the science of signs - the means by which meaning is represented and understood.

If this science can live up to its claims, it will clearly provide a useful way to inquiry into the interactional field that is the curriculum domain. In fact, Wexler (1982) has already been seduced by the potential of semiotics for investigating the curriculum

from the standpoint of content. He suggests that:

> The value of .... semiotics for a study of school
> knowledge is that by viewing curriculum as a set
> of rules or symbolic practices, it enables us to
> avoid reducing knowledge to a static representa-
> tion of social processes - a representation which
> subverts its critical intent by reifying symbolic
> activities (p. 285).

Wexler's agenda seems to be slightly different from the
aim articulated during the analysis presented here.
However, his ideas seem to have some affinity with the
project at hand since he underlines the necessity to
approach curriculum inquiry from the perspective of
interaction and meaning. The next chapter will therefore
be taken up with an exploration into the field of
semiotics, with a view to using it as the device for
inquiry into the interactional complex that is the
curriculum domain.

Chapter 4

Perspectives on Semiotics

It may be said that the principal aim of all
inquiry into the human condition is the discovery and
understanding of meanings that people derive from their
interactions with the 'object world' and also with
themselves. These meanings are the result of the
exchange of messages with and about the lived reality.
Furthermore, it is these messages which make social life
possible in the form it takes today. Basically, all
those areas of thought referred to as the human sciences
are engaged essentially in the study of meaning simply
because they attempt to describe and explain orderly
patterns of human behaviour.

Over the past decade or so, there has been a
resurgence of interest in a field of inquiry whose aim
is the systematic study of meaning. This field goes under
the name of semiotics or, alternatively, semiology. Its
significance may be seen in the staging of international
conferences, the establishment of associations, and the
appearance of an increasing number of books on the
subject (Sebeok, 1976). In a book on the proceedings
from the Second Congress of the International
Association for Semiotic Studies, Tasso Borbe states

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that:

> There is no doubt, semiotics is unfolding. It
> is unfolding in two directions: specialized
> branches of science are coming to semiotics
> with their problems and semiotics is unearthing
> new-found problems and solutions (1983, p.v).

Indeed, as the interest in semiotics increases, more and
more scholars from many and diverse fields of study
such as aesthetics, medicine, architecture and
anthropology, to name a few, explore the possibilities
of semiotics as a means of advancing inquiry.

Culler (1981), in his appraisal of the impact of
semiotics on the world of scholarship, makes reference
to the First Congress of the International Association
in 1974. He asserts that:

> If 650 people attend conferences on semiotics,
> that does not cause mutations in the world of
> scholarship but it is a fact of symbolic impor-
> tance. Semiotics, the science of signs, becomes
> something to be reckoned with even for those
> who reject it as a Gallic or technolog il
> obfuscation (p. 19).

He goes further to say that semiotics as a new
discipline will, necesarily affect those which have been
already established, especially those referred to as the
human and social sciences:

> The emergence of a new and agressive discipline
> involves a complex readjustment of boundaries
> and points of focus; no discipline can assume
> immunity from the effects of this process (p.20).

This is a plausible reason why semiotics is now being

taken quite seriously as a means of advancing those areas of inquiry which attempt to understand and explain the world and the behaviour of the people who live in and with it.

The Purport of Semiotics

The aim of semiotics is the study of meaning through the science of signs. The sign is the principal object of inquiry because it is held to be the means of expressing and apprehending meaning. Given this focus on the sign, it can be argued that semiotics is primarily concerned with the question of <u>mediation</u> since meaning is produced only by mediate action. To take the point further, it can also be argued that this mediation is the sine qua non' of all the interactions which take place between entities in both the natural and social world.

Indeed, interactions are what make the world as we know it possible and no phenomenon can be properly understood outside of the framework of this concept. As soon as a phenomenon can be seen as distinct from another, it then becomes necessary to take into consideration how it interacts with other phenomena in order to understand and explain it. Herein lies the importance of focussing on those mediational devices

which make this interaction possible. This is a very plausible reason why semiotics is attracting some much attention in so many diverse area of inquiry, since the sign is the only point of entry into the interactions which constitute the world.

Charles Morris (1985), a principal figure in the field, describes the purpose of semiotics as the study of signs in all their forms and sites. He describes this purpose in the following way:

> Semiotic(s) has for its goal a general theory
> of signs in all their forms and manifestations
> whether in animals or men, whether normal or
> pathological, whether linguistic or non-lin-
> guistic, whether personal or social. Semiotic(s)
> is thus an interdisciplinary enterprise (p. 178).

Umberto Eco another semiotician of note, sees the semiotic project in the same way as Morris, but within the framework of the definition of the sign. He says:

> Semiotics is concerned with everything that
> can be taken as significantly substituting for
> something else . This something else does
> not necessarily have to exist or to actually
> be somewhere at the moment in which a sign
> stands for it (1976, p. 7).

Sebeok (1976) goes further to suggest a programme for semiotics when he asserts:

> The subject matter of semiotics - ultimately a
> mode of extending one's perception of the world
> is the exchange of any messages whatever and of
> the systems of signs that underlie them (p. 1).

From all that has been said so far about the purport of

semiotics, it would seem that it is conceived of as having unlimited scope. Indeed every object in the world can be taken to be a sign and thus becomes a semiotic object. As far as the present study is concerned, semiotics will be discussed in terms of its relevance to human social activity since attempts are being made to apply it to investigation within the curriculum domain.

It is not difficult to see why semiotics appears to be so seductive to those who are involved in any way in inquiry into human experience. For, it may be said that the principal problematic that underlies all of these forms of inquiry is that of meaning, which, put simply is the sense that humans make of their interactions with themselves and the world around them. Further, the focus on mediation is a premium intellectual strategy since human contact with the object world is largely indirect and they are forever having to resort to all forms of prostheses to establish and maintain this contact (Bruner 1974, p. 68-69).

Nadin (1983) in arguing for the legitimacy of semiotics as a way of understanding sociocultural life, draws attention to this centrality of mediation in human behaviour. He asserts that:

>   The relationship of the human subject as an
>   individual and as a social being, to the
>   object in its varied forms of existence

> (including the subject as object) is more
> and more mediated through signs ... Education,
> culture and political practice are coming
> through less directly; mediation takes place
> through signs, practice becomes a matter of
> interpretation (p. 377).

MacCannel and MacCannel (1982) take the issue further
to show that the effect of this increasing mediation is
a crisis of meaning in cultural life. They argue that
the shifts in meaning systems resulting from rapid
cultural change, calls for a semiotic approach to social
inquiry which would concentrate on tne "means of the
production of meaning" (p. 9).

.The point must be made, however, that the semiotic
project will necessarily take its activities further
than studying the expression of meaning (signs), since
it has to take into account the underlying organisation
which makes the construction and communication of signs
possible. Culler (1981) makes the point in another way
in terms of the knowledge which underlies sign
production:

> Whatever area he is working in, someone
> adopting the semiotic perspective attempts
> to make explicit the implicit knowledge
> which enables people within a given society
> to understand one another's behaviour (p. 34).

Thus semiotics goes beyond the description of signs into
the task of revealing the "deeply rooted set of cultural
norms and conventions which operate subconsciously and

which members of a culture might deny angrily" (p. 32).
In a similar way, Ricoeur (1985) sees semiotics aiming
at a sort of "depth semantics" which is the result of
the search for correlations within and between social
phenomena treated as semiotic entities. He asserts that
the semiotic project would be uninteresting if this
depth semantics is not generated (p. 219 -220).

The purport of semiotics, then, at least in the
realm of human affairs, seems to be clear and it is
difficult to ignore since the scenario against which it
is set is a plausible reflection of the current status
of sociocultural life. This is even more true of the
educational arena which is an area of sociocultural life
which is explicitly concerned with the construction,
conveyance and interpretation of meanings.

The discussion on semiotics now moves to an
examination of some foundational ideas within the field
by considering the work of three prominent semioticians:
Ferdinand de Saussure, Roland Barthes and Charles
Peirce. Peirce and Saussure are usually regarded as the
co-founders of modern semiotics and much of contemporary
semiotic thought is influnced in one way or the other by
their thinking. Thus, an examination of some of their
ideas will be a useful starting point for building the
semiotic framework for curriculum inquiry. The third

semiotician Roland Barthes is equally important since his work represents some interesting developments on the work of Saussure. Additionally, his work has received a good deal of attention by many writers on semiotics and as such should be able to provide direction for the development of this present study.

The Semiology of Saussure

Ferdinand de Saussure, a Swiss linguist, is considered to be the originator of the term 'semiology' and it has been since used by most semioticians in Europe to designate the science of signs. Saussure was impressed by the pervasiveness of sign sytems in human social life among which language was only one.

> La langue est un systeme de signes exprimant des idees, et par la comparable a l'ecriture, a l'alphabet des sourd-muets, aux rites symbolique, aux formes de politesse, aux signaux militaire et cetera. Elle est seulement le plus important de ces systeme (1955, p. 33).

It is against the background of the existence of these sign systems in social life that Saussure called for a science for studying these systems.

> On peut concevoir une science qui etudie la vie des signes au sein de la vie sociale ; ... nous la nommerons semiologie du grec <<semeion>>, 'signe'... la linguistique n'est qu'une partie de cette science generale, les lois qui decou- vrira la semiologie seront applicable a la lin- guistique (op. cit. p.33).

Thus, according to Saussure the semiotic project was to inquire into social sign systems and their function in social life. But apart from the focus on the social, Saussure also puts foward methodological suggestions as to the kind of model that should be used to investigate semiotic phenomena. Linguistics, although considered to be a part of the general science of semiology, was to serve as "le patron general de toute semiologie" because it was more developed as a discipline and could therefore provide a guide, at least temporarily, for semiotic inquiry.

For Saussure, the sign is the product of a correlation between a 'signifier' and a 'signified', the former referring to the expression of a mental event which is the signified. Thus the colour 'red' correlates with an idea to signify 'danger'. It is very important to note that Saussure saw these two terms as inseparable if the sign was to exist at all.

He also sees this correlation between these two terms as arbitrary, in that there is nothing intrinsic to either of them to justify their correlation. For example, the sound of the word 'chair' is in no way concretely related to the object it represents. This arbitrariness of the sign is explained in terms of social convention. He says:

> En effet tout moyen d'expression recu dans une
> societe reppose en principe sur une habitude
> collective ou,.... la convention (p. 101).

However, all signs are not arbitrary; for Saussure speaks of motivated signs which possess a concrete relationship between the signifier and the signified. One linguistic example given is the onomatoppeia, where the linguistic sound approximates the object it represents.

Consistent with the dyadic nature of the sign, Saussure has advanced pairs of concepts which he derives from his linguistic theory, and which can presumably apply to his projected semiology. These concepts have, in fact been applied by semiologists choosing to follow Saussure's ideas.

The first pair of concepts that may be noted is that of 'langue' and 'parole'. The former refers to a coded system which guides the actual use of 'language (parole).

> La langue est pour nous la langage moins la
> parole. Elle est l'ensemble des habitudes
> linguistique qu' permet a un sujet de comprendre
> et de se faire comprendre (p. 112).

Thus 'parole' is not possible (socially) without 'langue', but at the same time the former provides the stuff of the latter since "... il faut une masse parlante pour qu'il ait une langue" (p. 112).

Such an assertion points to the fundamentally social nature of the sign, because although the underlying code is in fact an abstraction, it is constituted as a result of social interaction. But what is missing from this account is the manner in which the social interaction is converted into code. Such an insight will provide a better understanding of how the conventions on which signs are based come into being. This will be dealt with later.

Another pair of concepts which Saussure puts forward is 'syntagmatic' and 'associative' relations (op. cit. p.170-175). In linguistic terms, these relations may be described as follows: in the linear structure of a sentence, words are arranged in grammatical slots which are juxtaposed following a code, for example, subject-verb-object, to be simple. This sequence is referred to as syntagmatic relations. But within each slot in the sequence, a number a possible alternative words may be used without prejudice to the syntagm. For example, any transitive verb may fit into the slot allocated for verb. This is what is referred to as associative relations. Thus, acording to Saussure, language structure is basically a linear system composed of units which are arranged both horizontally and vertically at the same time.

But these units are not considered in themselves. They are seen in terms of their relations to other units in a particular language structure. This notion is what Saussure refers to as a 'system of difference'. As an illustration, consider the phonemic make-up of the sign 'bad'. This only makes sense when it is considered within the complex of other sounds such as 'had', 'lad', 'sad' and 'mad'. Thus meaning is realised when the speaker/listener perceives differences created by the presence/absence of the initial phone in each sound. Meaning therefore has very little to do with the substance of the sound itself and almost everything to do with its relations to other sounds.

Comments on Saussure

From this brief con   ation of Saussure's semiology, a number of observ   ons may be made. Firstly, it is clear that Saussure has circumscribed the scope of his semiology to deal only with conventional social sign systems, which means that other forms of sign behaviour that are not considered as established would not be dealt with. If we refer back to the point of the changing meaning systems made by Nadin and the MacCannels, such a restricted scope of semiology runs the risk of studying only 'official' sign systems.

The consequence of this restricted view of social signification is a methodological perspective which is somewhat inadequate for investigating not only emergent signs systems but also the related processual aspects of sign systems. In other words, since Saussure focusses on the pre-existing codes of signifying behaviour and not on the use of the codes in communication, he misses that interactional field where the substance of the code is generated.

The notions of the arbitrary and the conventional, indeed opens up the way to a search for those nascent sytems yet to be established. But Saussure does not seem to want to take the opportunity to study the sociogenesis of sign systems, when he restricts his semiology to conventional established systems.

Perhaps related to predeliction for established systems is his notion of the sign which he sees as a correlation between two terms. Because this sign is seen as the building block of conventional systems, this correlation could only be interpreted as fixed and not having the potential for variation. Thus, it would seem that each term in the sign cannot correlate with another term. Now, if we consider the fact that the sign is partly constituted by mental events and, given the potential idiosyncracy of the human mind, the possibilty

that the correlation with the signifier might change giving rise to another sign, must be considered. Saussure although, opening up this possibility through the social focus on the sign, seems to have ignored this and, in fact, conceived the social just like another abstract system with only immanent properties.

It is not difficult to see how Saussure tended to take . the dynamism of the social for granted since his model of the sign was a linguistic one. The linguistic sign does indeed give that notion that it is stable and susceptible to study simply because it has been developed and represented in a clear systematic way - phonetically and syntactically. And although there are many problems with this representation, it is likely that the model will be used to describe other signs. Another very important point that comes up here is the fundamental influence that the conception of the nature of the sign has on all aspects of the semiotic enterprise. Its dyadic character can be seen in all of the methodological constructs put forward by Saussure and indeed in much of the work of those who have chosen to follow his ideas. In fact, Saussure's linguistic and semiological work has had a lasting impact not only on linguistic theory but in many areas of scholarship such as anthropology.

An evaluation of the semiological ideas of Saussure as briefly described above will be undertaken later, but the work of Barthes will now be considered.

Roland Barthes

Roland Barthes' work in semiotics is heavily influenced by that of Saussure . This is quite evident in his first major publication on the subject, Elements of Semiology (1967), in which he presents his foundational ideas for the semiotic project. However, despite this influence, there are a number of important diverge from Saussure's work.

In the first place Barthes broadened the semiotic project to include sign systems other than the conventional ones identified by his predecessor. He felt that any set of phenomena could be studied as a system of social meaning:

> Semiology therefore aims to take in any system
> of signs, whatever their substance and limits;
> images, gestures, musical sounds, objects and
> the complex associations of all those which
> form the content of ritual, convention or public
> entertainment. These constitute, if not languages,
> at least systems of signification (p.10).

But, according to Barthes, these systems of signification are intelligible within the framework of language. He makes the point that "every semiological system has its linguistic admixture" and goes on to show

how such systems as those of food and fashion, although partly meaningful in themselves, get their full signification through the mediation of language. He asserts that :

> ... there is no meaning which is not designated and the world of signifieds is none other than that of language (p. 10).

In fact Barthes inverts the Saussurean relationship between language and semiology but subsuming the latter under the former:

> ... linguistic is not part of the general science of signs ... it is semiology that is a part of linguistics; to be precise it is that part covering the great signifying unities of discourse (p. 99).

Thus, with Barthes, linguistics becomes not the 'patron general' but the condition of possibility for semiotics as a field of study.

However, Barthes conception of the sign is somewhat different from that of Saussure although he sees the sign as the union of the signfier and the signified, he attempts to address the stasis implied in this dyadic concept by trying to account for the variability of human action. As such, he sees the dyadic sign as:

> ... having only classifying (not phenomeno- logical) value: firstly because the union of the signifier and the signified, as we shall see does not exhaust the semantic act, for the sign derives its value from its surroun- dings; secondly, because, probably, the mind does not proceed in the semantic process, by

conjunction but by carving out (p. 14).

Thus Barthes is concerned with the need to consider a third element in the conception of the sign although he did not articulate it as such and it will be seen that this consideration is a guiding principle in his approach to inquiry.

Barthes goes further to elaborate on the basic nature of the sign by introducing the two new concepts of expression and content, which relate to the signifier and the signified, respectively. These two concepts are in turn expanded by two others - form and substance. The former refers to that which may be described in purely linguistic terms, while the latter is applied to those aspects of linguistic phenomena which cannot be described "without resorting to extralinguistic premises". The scheme involving all of these notions appears below.

*Table 2.*Expression and Content

	FORM	SUBSTANCE
CONTENT	Formal organization of the signifieds among themselves	Emotional, ideological or notional aspects of the signified
EXPRESSION	Paradigmatic and syntactic rules	Phonic, articulatory non-functional substance (field of phonetics)

The linguistic orientation of this scheme is obvious and although it is a very useful elaboration of the conception of the sign, it can easily be seen that some nonlinguistic signs defy analysis under this scheme

Barthes in fact sees that the semiological sign system may differ from its linguistic counterpart at the level of substance since many semiological signs in their essence do not primarily signify. In this case, the system is constituted by objects which are used in everyday life but signify only secondarily. For example, clothes are used for protection and food for nourishment at a basic level, but these can become signs of wealth and good taste. Barthes makes the point as follows: '... as soon as there is a society, every usage is converted into a sign of itself" (p. 41).

In this connection, he also makes the point that once the sign is constituted, society can easily refunctionalize it, establishing a natural link between the object and usage. Thus " a fur coat will be described as if it served only to protect from the cold" (p. 42).

This takes us to another of Barthes' important pair of concepts - denotation and connotati . Of course these categories are not new, but he articulates them in

terms of the prior notion of 'myth'. By 'myth' he means those ideas underlying social thought and practice which have the function of making them (thought and practice) acceptable as the natural state of affairs.

. Denotation refers to the simple process where a signifier is attached to a signified to produce a sign. The process of connotation is a bit more complex as the signifier or signified of an original denotative sign correlates with another signifier or signified to form a connotative sign. Of course the original meaning of the denotative sign is not entirely lost as some residual meaning is necessary for the smooth movement to the connotative sign.

This is the process on which he rests the notion of 'myth' which in fact can be seen as a dramatic departure from Saussurean semiology. For Barthes myth means the use of the connotative process to present ideas in such a way that they seem like the natural state of affairs. Myth is created when an original sign is taken and transformed into the signifier which in turn correlates with another signified to form another sign. This process is illustrated in his <u>Mythologies</u> (1972, p. 115).

Table 4 The Connotative Sign

1. Signifier	2. Signified	
3. Sign I SIGNIFIER		II SIGNIFIED
III SIGN		

Language
MYTH

Thus, according to Barthes

> ... myth is a peculiar system, in that it is
> constructed from a semiological chain which
> existed before it : it is a second-order
> semiological system (p. 114).

He goes further to show how myth operates as a signifying process. The signifier, which is already a self-contained entity which signifies, is emptied of its content and used to be the vehicle of another idea. However, the signifier is not totally stripped of its meaning as an original sign; it is impoverished but left with some residual meaning in order to make the mythical sign all the more natural. Coward and Ellis (1977) represent this process below using an example from Mythologies.

Table 5. The Mythical Sign

	D.1. SIGNIFIER Photographic image	D.2. SIGNIFIED Negro saluting French flag	
Language	D.3. SIGN C.I. SIGNIFIER		C.II. SIGNIFIED Colonialist nationalism, militarism
Myth	C.III. SIGN		

The photograph denotes a black soldier saluting the French flag. However, at the level of connotation this denotative sign becomes the signifier of a new sign which represents the idea that French colonialism is a good thing since even the black colonials themselves defend it.

For Barthes, the study of myth is only one aspect of the semiotic project, but it does raise some questions about the use of the sign in social life. In the first place the notion of myth is clearly a way into the critique of bourgeois society which uses mythical signs as a means of sustaining its hegemony. But at the more technical level, the sign now has a third term - an intended interpreter. For, if in the case of myth, sign production is socially motivated, then it must be intended to be interpreted by someone.

It is at this point that Barthes runs into

difficulty because myth only takes the sign process to the point of an intended interpreter. He does not get to the actual response of those for whom the sign was intended. Thus he is fixated at the level of 'langue' without considering the 'masse parlante' which has to negotiate this 'langue' thereby giving life and dynamism to the sign.

However, this neglect of the interactional aspect of sign behaviour is perhaps a deliberate strategy by Barthes since it is quite consistent with his view that semiology is basically a study of forms which provide the only point of access to the study of meaning. He makes the point more clearly when he says :

> But what must be firmly established at the start
> is that myth is a system of communication, that
> is, a message. This allows one to perceive that
> myth cannot possibly be an object, a concept, or
> an idea; it is mode of signification, a form
> (p. 109).

But this must not be taken to mean that it will be a study using the abstractions of the Saussurean mode. Far from dealing only with the immanence of form Barthes sees the necessity to locate myth in the social matrix:

> Later we shall have to assign to this form
> historical limits, conditions of use, and
> reintroduce society into it (p. 109).

Thus the reading here can be that signification will be the first part of the semiotic project which will have

to move into the question of the social matrix for a full explanation of the sign. Such an approach seems acceptable since the study of sign behaviour within a society must begin with the systems that make this behaviour possible. However, Barthes did not suggest a programme for moving beyond this level into the realm of actual behaviour.

It cannot be denied, however, that the study of social signification is an essential part of the semiotic approach of social inquiry simply because those pre-existing systems which make up the 'langue' of signifying practices must be addressed if there is to be meaningful analysis of the actual practices.

Barthes has also attempted to use the Saussurean concepts of system and syntagm to analyse certain signifying systems within the society such as clothes food and furniture. An examples of this appears below.

Table 6. System and Syntagm in Social Practices

Again he has in fact presented a system of signification whose validity must await further inquiry into how they are negotiated within the 'masse parlante'.

This emphasis on the structure without reference to action does not detract from the usefulness of Barthes' semiology for approaching social inquiry, since social semiotic behaviour, at the level of interaction, must be predated by a context of signification which, in fact makes that behaviour possible. In such a way, a proper understanding of the interactional level, cannot be achieved without reference to the context in which it takes place. Barthes has provided both the conceptual and analytic tools for approaching this level of inquiry. Without further comment on Barthes for the moment, we now pass on to the semiotics of Charles Peirce who is considered to be the other co-founder of modern semiotics.

The Semiotics of Charles Peirce

Charles Sanders Peirce (1839 - 1914) of the U.S.A. is widely considered to be one of the founders of modern semiotics, especially on this side of the Atlantic. Although his work on signs took up a large part of his later life and represents a significant part of his intellectual efforts, it is by all accounts, but

a fraction of his total output. He was by orientation a respected and reputable scientist, but he also worked in the fields of pure and applied logic.

All of these interests coalesced under the rubric of a general epistemological position to which he referred to as pragmatism. It is therefore useful at the outset to examine some of the notions which make up this position since it is the matrix for his theory of signs.

Pragmatism

For Peirce what he called pragmatism' did not have the status of a full-blown philosophy as it is generally thought. It was essentially an approach to the problem of meaning, motivated by the perceived need to clarify meanings. He describes this pragmatism as follows:

> I understand pragmatism to be a method of ascertaining the meaning, not of all ideas, but only what I call 'intellectual concepts', that is to say, of those upon which arguments concerning objective fact may hinge (1965-1966, 5.468).

It must be pointed out here immediately that Peirce is not concerned with meaning in a general sense because he focusses on 'intellectual concepts' which may be translated as those meanings which are located in the world of scholarship. And he also had specific ways of discovering these meanings:

> ...in order to ascertain the meaning of an in-
> tellectual conception one should consider what
> by necessity from the truth of that conception;
> and the sum total of these consequences will
> constitute the entire meaning of the conception
> (5.9).

It can be seen immediately that an idea is devoid of meaning if it cannot be shown to have practical consequences and these consequences must be a reference to the context of the object world. This emphasis on practical consequences and, by extension, the external world, is fundamental to Peirce's thought. In fact this is the basis on which he mounts an objection to the Cartesian approach to inquiry and knowledge.

The Cartesian position on the conduct of inquiry is well known: knowledge is gained only when the logical possibility of error is completely removed from the process of thought and judgement. This practice of unrelenting doubt is achieved through the process of introspection, as propositions about the nature of things are tested by recourse to the soundness of the premises on which they are based and not through any correspondence with the external world. Thus the process of knowing rests on intuition, that type of mental activity that is innate, independent of anything that is external to the human mind.

Peirce's objection to this approach to knowing is

radical and this can be summarised by what he refers to as "Four Incapacities":

1. We have no power of introspection, but all knowledge of the internal world is derived by hypothetical reasoning from our knowledge of external facts.
2. We have no power of intuition, but every cognition is determined logically by previous cognitions.
3. We have no power of thinking without signs.
4. We have no conception of the absolutely incognizable (5.265).

These objections represent a patent denial of knowing as the result of a purely innate process, but just as clear is the insistence on the external determination of this process as an alternative explanation.

This idea seems to be related to another one of Peirce that has to do with the process of arriving at the truth, which is a community effort.

> ... to make single individuals absolute judges of truth is most pernicious ... We individually cannot reasonably hope to attain the ultimate philosophy which we pursue; we can only seek it therefore for the community of philosophers (5.265).

The relationship between this value position and the epistemological stance can be more clearly seen in the following point about the discovery of reality:

> The real ... is that which, sooner or later, information and reasoning would soon result in, and which is therefore independent of the vagaries of me and you. Thus the very origin of the conception of reality shows that this conception essentially involves the notion of a community without limits and capable of a de-

finite increase of knowledge (5.186-187).

Peirce has therefore bestowed on this arbitrating community a sort of omnipotence that transcends the individual efforts in the pursuit of truth. It can be argued that the transcendence of pure reason has been replaced by the transendence of an hypothetical community of scholars.

However, it is in this commitment to this community of scholars ánd the derived principle of externajity that we see the way in which Peirce's theory of signs is embedded in the whole scheme. For, if the product of individual thought is to be held up to the community for intelligibility and meaning is to be validated by external criteria, then there must exist some external conventional means for the formation and expression /representation of those ideas. Thus a theory of signs comes into the picture.

Modes of Being

Like most of Peirce's thinking on the conduct of inquiry, his theory of signs is based on ideas about the nature of human consciousness. According to him the functioning and constitution of consciousness could be described in terms of three qualitatively different categories which he referred to as modes of being:

> My view is that there are, three modes of being.
> I hold that we can directly observe them in
> elements of whatever is at any time before the
> mind in any way. They are the being of positive
> qualitative possibility, the being of actual
> fact, and the being of law that will govern
> facts in the future (1.23).

These modes of being are referred to as 'Firstness',
'Secondness', and 'Thirdness', respectively. The
experience of firstness is preconceptual and therefore
fleeting and amorphous. As soon as it is felt it
evaporates, defying recall in its primordial state.
Secondness, on the other hand, refers to that category
of experience that is more palpable ; that object which
can be recognised as such and located spatially and
temporally in the stream of consciousness. Further, the
experience of secondness originates in the raw existence
of the particular and is essentially the nonconceptual
awareness by the subject that some object exists.
Thirdness as a category of experience is characterised
by the property of reflexiveness which is absent in the
previous two. It is a mediated type of experience in
which the immediacy of secondness is converted into
something conceptual.

Thus while it may be said that firstness is
prereflective and secondness is non-reflective, the
consciousness of process or synthesis, which is
thirdness, clearly involves some event that goes beyond

the mere awareness of the existence of an object ; a
mental event therefore results in the imposition of
order on disparate elements of consciousness. Peirce
summarises this schema as follows:

> Here then we have indubitably three
> radically different elements of consciousness
> these and no more. And they are evidently con
> nected with the ideas one-two three. Immediate
> feeling is the consciousness of the first;
> the polar sense is the consciousness of the se-
> cond; and the synthetical consciousness is the
> consciousness of the third or medium (1.381).

It may be noted in passing here that the
thoroughgoing externality, on which Peirce, insists is
only really found in the category of secondness. It is
only here we see a direct, concrete encounter with the
objective external world. The other categories tend to
be largely private and internal.

In considering these three categories, the first
question that comes into focus is the relationship
between them. Peirce himself points out some difficulty
inherent in the scheme. He states that :

> ... though it is easy to distinguish the three
> categories from one another, it is extremely
> difficult accurately and sharply to distinguish
> each from the other conceptions so as to hold
> it in its purity and yet in its full meaning
> (1.353).

This can be taken to mean that on the formal level, the
categories can be easily seen as separate, but from the
point of view of ontology, one cannot be understood

without reference to the other. Indeed it would be impossible to speak properly of thirdness in the absence of secondness or secondness in the absence of firstness. Consequently, it seems plausible to see the three categories as a continuum of interrelated stages that result, finally, in something complete; at least in terms of consciousness. Of course, the final stage is thirdness which Peirce on another occasion describes as 'synthetic consciousness, binding time together, a sense of learning, thought (1.381).

But Peirce seems to give a privileged position to thirdness among the categories, as we see when he discusses the role of each in cognition:

> But that element of cognition which is neither
> feeling nor the polar sense, is the conscious-
> ness of process and this in the form of sense of
> learning, of acquiring, of mental growth, is emi-
> nently characteristic of cognition (1.381).

If we go back to the notion of 'practical effects' as the prerequisite for meaning, and also the idea that individual experience in the process of inquiry should be held up for scrutiny within the community, it is easy to see why thirdness is so important. For conceptions, which are the final products of consciousness and which are to be represented to the community, are essentially of the nature of thirdness.

Taking this argument further, we can now see why,

since all thought is in signs, Peirce spent the latter part of his life working on his theory of signs : he was clearly concerned with the development of a formal system by which thought could be presented to the community. Thus it may be said that the theory of signs was conceived in order to faciltate the process of inquiry. With such a background the argument now moves to the specific consideration of Peirce's theory of signs.

Peirce's Theory of Signs

Peirce held that his theory of signs was synonymous with logic and this is not surprising given his pragmatism. He states :

> Logic is in its general sense... only another name for 'semiotic', the quasi-necessary or formal, doctrine of signs (2.227).

This sense of logic resides in what he refers to as a process of 'Abstraction' which is employed to arrive at general statements about the nature of signs following the observations on the use of these signs in the realm of public experience. Consider this point in Peirce's own words

> By describing the doctrine as 'quasi-necessary' or formal, I mean that we observe the characters of such signs as we know and by such observation, by a process which I will not object to naming Abstraction, we are led to statements eminently fallible, and therefore in one sense

> by no means necessary, as to what must be the
> character of all signs used by a 'scientific'
> intelligence, that is to say an intel-
> ligence capable of learning by experience
> (2.227).

This process of abstraction which seems fundamental to Peirce's epistemology can be portrayed as follows: in discerning a gap between the pre-reflective desires and the actual conditions for their fulfilment in the objective external world, the individual returns the object of his desires to the internal world in order to see how the original desires may be reshaped to bring them more in concert with the external world (2.227).

Once more we see the parallel here with the three categories of consciousness where desires (firstness) confront the objective, external world (secondness) followed by a reconciliation to result in a changed consciousness (thirdness). It is this conceptual framework which, as we see later, runs through not only the conception of signs but also his view of the conduct of inquiry.

As a starting point to his theory of signs, Peirce presents a not too simple conception of the sign which is as follows:

> A sign or 'representamen', is something
> which stands to somebody for something in
> some respect or capacity. It addresses some-
> body, that is, creates in the mind of that
> person an equivalent sign, or perhaps a more

> developed one. The sign which it creates I
> call the interpretant of the first sign. The
> sign stands for something , its object. It
> stands for that object, not in all respects,
> but in reference to some sort of idea, which
> I have sometimes called the 'ground' of the
> representamen (2.228).

Peirce goes on to explain that idea is used in the

Platonic sense of form which serves as a sort of meen,

but which at the same time cannot be captured in its

totality or in its true essence (2.228).

The sign then, can be said to have three elements:

the ground, the object and the interpretant. Thus the

parallel between these three and the categories of

firstness (ground), secondness (object) and thirdness

(interpretant) is strongly suggested. But what is more

important is the way he sees the relations between these

three elements which he puts thusly:

> A sign or 'representamen' is a first which
> stands in such a genuine triadic relation to
> a Second, called its 'Object', as to be capa-
> ble of determining a Third, called its 'Inter-
> pretant' to assume the same triadic relation to
> its Object in which it stands itself to the same
> Object (2.231).

It would seem then that the sign is a triadic unity in

which each term is necessary to the existence of the

other two. But what is curious is the suggestion that

the idea/ground and the sign are one and the same, at

least at some point. Or, put another way, the sign is a

term that is constitutive of itself, which seems to be begging the question.

This problem can be partially explained by considering the role of the interpretant in the triadic relations. The interpretant, being the the component of thirdness in the sign relation, is that which binds the ground to the object and as such carries out the mediating function that finally produces the sign. At the same time Peirce sees it as the possibility condition for the creation of another sign. Thus this interpretant becomes the ground of the next sign relation. This peculiar position of the interpretant opens up the posssibility for a kind of dynamism in which every sign becomes the beginning of another sign relation, ad infinitum. Peirce refers to this process as semiosis(5.467).

Further, Peirce considers the study of the interpretant to be at the heart of the semiotic enterprise. He says:-

> Now the problem of what the "meaning" of an intellectual concept is can only be solved by the study of the interpretants, or the proper significate effects, of signs (5.475).

Implicit in this statement is not only the privileged position of thirdness but also the foundational notion of "practical effects" on which his whole epsitemology

is erected. It must be noted however, that this preference for thirdness, which has to do with relations rather than substance and which, therefore, tends to be mental/internal, seems a bit at odds with the pragmatist emphasis on the external.

However, this does not mean that Peirce is dealing with some purely metaphysical realm; for if we go back to the process of abduction, it can be seen that external materiality is clearly involved in the picture. But, once it has been established as a basis for consciousness, it quickly becomes nothing more than a first premise in its (consciousness) ontology. In other words, once the actual is apprehended, the subsequent emergence of meaning is the result of an essentially abstract and relational process.

Herein lies the essence of re-presentation which, in turn, is the raison d'etre' of the sign and Peirce reinforces this function of the sign when he says:

> The sign can only represent the Object and tell
> about it. It cannot furnish acquaintance with or
> recognition of that object; for that is what is
> meant in this volume by the Object of the sign;
> namely, that with which it presupposes an ac-
> quaintance in order to convey some further in-
> formation concerning it (2.229).

The tendency from brute materiality toward the relational process is quite obvious here, but more important is the insistence that the external world must

be essential in the sign.

Classification of Signs

Based on this conception of the sign Peirce undertook the task of classifying signs. He, in fact, developed several classificatory schemes but the most basic will be addressed in the essay. In this particular scheme, . the motif of the triad predictably appears as Peirce proposes a classification in terms of trichotomies composed of signs which: a) relate to themselves intrinsically; b) relate to external objects; and c) represent the interpretations of other signs. The scheme below below is a representation of the the classification by Parret (1983).

Table 7. The Peircean Taxonomy of Signs

SEMIOTIC AXIS Type of sign	Firstness QUALITY	Secondness EXISTENCE	ONTOLOGICAL AXIS Thirdness THOUGHT
repertoire *representamen* as a sign	possible sign	real sign/ mark, imprint	encoded sign/ arche-typical sign
domain *object* as a sign	icon	index	symbol
field *interpreter* as a sign	'represented'- conceived sign	spoken sign/ dicisign	interpreted/ inferred sign
	generality of the possible ABDUCTION	unicity/ singularity INDUCTION	instrumental generality DEDUC-TION

← EPISTEMOLOGICAL AXIS

The taxonomy represents three axes which intersect on the levels of representation, ontology and epistemology. The motif of the triad is again obvious and the whole classificatory system is so logical that it is self-arranged, having the capacity to generate more classes through the intersections. In fact, the system proposed in this classification is a self-contained world which has no movement outwards.

To continue the discussion on this taxonomy, we shall focus on the second trichotomy as it is the one that is addressed most often by readers of Peirce. Additionally, being the trichotomy in which signs are related to objects, it seems to be the most clearly illustrative of the principles underlying the taxonomy. This trichotomy is composed of the icon, index and symbol and although at the ontological level they are characterised by secondness, they each have the quality of thirdness simply because they are all signs consisting of firstness secondness and thirdness. Peirce sees this trichotomy as follows:

> First, an analysis of the essence of a sign ...,
> leads to a proof that 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 in-
> dividual object, when I call the sign an Index;
> thirdly, by a more or less approximate certainty
> that it will be interpreted as denoting the object

> in consequence of habit.... when I call the sign
> a symbol ...(4.351).

Thus, it can be said that the icon shares some properties with the object it represents; the index functions as a sign by its contiguity to the object it represents; and the symbol functions, not through any resemblance or contiguity with the object, but through an abstract, non-natural relationship with it (object) established through habit or convention.

The icon in keeping with the nature of a first, is a sign unto itself; for the basis of the resemblance between it and the object is really a potential one, having nothing to do with that object. Peirce says:

> An Icon is a sign which refers to the Object
> that it denotes merely by virtue of characters
> of its own, and which it possesses just the
> same whether the object exists or not (2.247).

Peirce goes on to make an apparently contradictory statement when he asserts that the icon does not act as a sign in the absence of an object.

> It is true that unless there is such an object,
> the icon does not act as a sign; but this has
> nothing to do with its character as a sign. Any-
> thing whatever, be it a quality, existent, in-
> dividual or law is an icon of anything, in so
> far as it is like that thing and is used as a
> sign of it (4.447).

The problem deepens when Peirce points out the independence of the icon from the external world.

> A pure icon can convey no positive or factual
> information; for it affords no assurance that
> there is any such thing in nature. But it is
> of the utmost value for enabling its inter-
> preter to study what would be the character of
> such an object should it exist (4.447).

It would seem here that the icon is a sign that is
initially the result of a purely mental event, devoid of
any basis in the external world - at least at the time
of creation. Further, it would seem to be a sort of
frame of reference in the mind that makes it possible
for any sign to come into being.

Now such a perspective on the icon can be seen to
be in concert with the Chomskyan notion of innate
structures; or perhaps, more so, with the Piagetian idea
of schemata. But such a notion can hardly find
accommodation in the antipsychologism on which Peirce is
adamant. Peirce's logicality can probably find a way out
of this problem by saying that the icon is intelligible
since , for other signs to exist, there must be the
precondition of possibility. But this is at the abstract
level of logic. When inquiry into the human use of signs
proceeds to any significant depth the precondition of
possibility will have to be accounted for in a more
palpable sense.

Still, for all this emphasis on mere possibility,
Peirce gives some examples of the icon such as images,

metaphors and diagrams (2.227). But if we say that icons are possibilites, then their concretisation into these intended examples should mean that they become something else while still retaining the iconic quality. Thus it would seem more reasonable to refer to them as iconic signs . Indeed. Peirce makes the point in a similar way :

> A possibility alone is an icon purely by
> virtue of its quality; and its object can
> only be a Firstness. But a sign may be iconic,
> that is, may represent its object merely by
> similarity, no matter what its mode of being
> (2.227).

This seems to be Peirce's way of dealing with the clash between the potential and the existential. For, as was said before, the icon only acts as a sign when the association by similarity with some external object is established. But the creation of this association erodes the quality of firstness in the icon, while at the same time, it has to be recognised that firstness is the origin of the sign. Thus the notion of the iconic sign, rather than the icon seems more intelligible.

The idea of the index is far less complicated mainly because it is a sign that has a direct relationship to something concrete. Peirce describes the index thusly:

> An index is a representamen which fulfils the
> function of a representamen by virtue of a
> character which it could not have if its object
> did not exist, but which it will continue to

> have just the same whether it be interpreted as
> a representamen or not (2.292).

Thus, this sign gets its being through its contiguity with the object it represents and because of this quality, it can be distinguished from the other signs in the manner that Peirce puts it:

> Indices may be distinguished from other signs,
> or representations by three characteristic
> marks: first, that they have no significant
> resemblance to their objects; second that
> they refer to individual single units, single
> collections of units, or single continua;
> third, that they direct the attention of their
> objects by blind compulsion (2.292).

The quality of secondness can clearly be seen in the index, especially in the second and third characteristics above.

Peirce identifies many examples of the index (2.309) among which are : a sundial indicating the time of day; smoke indicating fire ; and letters indicating the parts of a diagram. Also, as linguistic examples, he cites pronouns, prepositions and prepositional phrases. However, he again points to the difficulty of separating the index totally from the other signs:

> ... it would be difficult, if not impossible,
> to instance an absolutely pure index, or to
> find a sign absolutely devoid of the indexical
> quality (2.306).

This character of any of the sign classes can now be taken for granted and cannot be left out of any

serious discussion of the taxonomy.

If the index is characterised by its particularity
and externality, then the symbol, according to Peirce,
is the creature of a mental event and characterised by
generality. One of his many descriptions of the symbol
goes as follows:

> ... the third (or symbol) is the general
> name or description which signifies its
> object by means of an association of ideas
> of habitual connection between the name and
> the character signified (1.369).

Peirce goes on to emphasise the nominal function of the
symbol:

> An ordinary word as "give", "bird", "marriage"
> is an example of a symbol. It is applicable to
> whatever may be found to realize the idea con-
> nected with the word; it does not in itself iden-
> tify those things (2.298).

So, what is emphasised here is the essence of thirdness:
the movement away from the concreteness of the material
to the abstractness of the relational in the creation of
a sign that has no existential connection with the
object it represents. Thus

> The symbol is connected with its object
> by virtue of the idea of a symbol-using
> mind, without which no such connection will
> exist (2.299).

Peirce also makes the significant point that the
symbol develops out of other signs, which is in keeping
with what has already been said about the others. But

what is significant is that symbols grow but only out of other symbols since, according to Peirce, the precondition for growth is the concept and only the symbol has that property.

Another significant point made about the symbol is that because of this capacity for growth, it changes its meanings in social context:

> A symbol, once in being, spreads among the peoples. In use and in experience, its mean-ing grows. Such words as force, law, ..., marriage, bear for us very different mean-ings from those they bore for our ancestors (2.265).

This reference to the sociocultural matrix of the sign is very significant for this discussion of Peirce's semiotics because his emphasis on logicality seem somewhat anathema to the fact that the meaning of signs should change. This will be elaborated further on .

Comments on Peircean Semiotics

The foregoing is but a brief description of Peirce's work in signs. A few general comments will now be made on the description.

The first point to be emphasised is that his theory of signs was a response to the need to achieve some form of intersubjectivity within a community of scholars in respect of the products and processes of their intellectual activities. But this response was

necessarily guided by a view not only of the expression
of meaning through signs but also an epistemological
stance (if these two can be separated). Thus, if looked
at in a general sense, Peirce was presenting a programme
for the conduct of all inquiry. This motive has hardly
been addressed by those who try to apply his semiotics
to their inquiry as the focus has been mostly on the
taxonomy of signs.

There is a number of suggestions put forward by
Peirce which can at least be discussed as guidelines for
the conduct of inquiry. Firstly, the very notion of a
semiotics as providing a means of discourse among
scholars is very seductive. This is in fact evidenced by
the enthusiasm with which modern scholars embrace
semiotics as a means of talking with one another.

Secondly, the function of the categories of
firstness, secondness and thirdness is not only a basis
for describing signs. It seems to go right to the heart
of inquiry as it speaks to the constitution of
experience in a rather clear and straightforward way.
Thus, it may be friutful to ask, within the framework of
these categories: how does the inquirer really go about
making sense of his e-perience before, during and after
his encounter with an object of inquiry? Peirce's
categories seem to address this question directly and it

can at least be asked to what extent they reflect the state of affairs relative to human consciousness in the process of inquiry.

Concerning the theory of signs itself, we see that the insistence on logicality and externality led Peirce to attempt a classification of signs with a sort of mathematical neatness but which he himself admitted was an almost impossible task for a number of reasons. Firstly, the use of logic as the basis for the classification really was not consistent with the maxim that all thought was in signs. This is so because with logic even though one begins with observation from actuality one ultimately reaches an 'if-then' situation; which will not always be consistent with the actual situation. In fact, this is the only reason why Peirce could develop such a bewildering compendium of signs.

Another problem with the neatness of the categories is the overlap between them, which led to the integrity of each category. Peirce himself admitted this difficulty and in fact suggested that each sign bore some necessary relation to the other. But this problem seems to be compounded by the scant regard for the sociocultural matrix within which the sign is necessarily located. Consider, for example, a picture of the Virgin Mary. If my cultural experience has not

exposed me to the myth of the Virgin, it is merely an iconic sign of a woman. But to all good Catholics, the picture is a symbol for all sorts of things. The point is that a particular sign will or will not cross over to other categories depending on the sociocultural situation. It is true that with the symbol Peirce took some account of its fate within society, but it was merely mentioned in passing.

Despite these problems, the theory of signs does seem to have much heuristic potential for inquiry into sociocultural meaning for important reasons. Firstly, although like Barthes ussure, Peirce does not seem to go beyond signification, the notion of the interpretant imbues the sign with a sort of dynamism which, at least leads the way into the study of how signs are actually used and produced in the human realm. Secondly, the taxonomy does suggest a scheme for studying different kinds of signs and how they function relative to human behaviour. Thirdly, when all of this is put together we get a comprehensive approach to the analysis and interpetation of human behaviour.

Summary of the Perspectives

In general terms, the two semiotic perspectives have quite different projects relative to the study of

meaning. The Peircean semiotics tend to be 'generic' insofar as it tries to account for all expressions of meaning possible in both the natural and social world. Such a project is understandable in view of the intention to provide a theory of sign which would enable scholars to speak intelligibly to themselves and others about their observations during the course of inquiry. The logical consequence of this need to standardise communication is a taxonomy of signs which has been the major thrust of Peircean semiotics.

The Saussurean approach to the study of meaning is restricted to the realm of social life and focussing on pre-existing forms of signification. Barthes later extended to all forms of signification but does this against the determining matrix of social power and values.

What is significant about Barthes and Saussure is their insistence on the essentially social nature of signifying behaviour, an issue which Peircean semiotics hardly deals with. However, it seems possible to combine these two semiotic perspectives, utilising their particular strenghts, in order to lay the foundations of a semiotic approach to curriculum inquiry. Therefore, the next task will be an examination of both perspectives in order to ascertain the usefulness of

each to social inquiry in general. This will set the stage for their application to the investigation of· the curriculum domain, which is, essentially, 'a social arena.

Chapter 5

Towards Semiotics and Social Inquiry

An attempt will now be made to see how the semiotic
ideas of Peirce, Saussure and Barthes may be of
relevance to inquiry in the social realm. This will be
done from the perspective of certain selected issues
held to be important in the semiotic domain. These are:
a) the nature of the sign; b) the relationship of
language and semiotics; and c) the scope of semiotics as
a field of inquiry.

The Nature of the Sign

It is generally agreed that the sign is an entity
that stands for something else. It i   so agreed that
it is the product of a correlation between at least two
terms - a material object and a mental event. While the
Peircean notion includes three terms (ground, object
and interpretant), the Saussurean tradition sees two
(signifier and signified). The basic problem with these
two conceptions of the sign is that they tend to neglect
the role of the human subject in the production of
meaning.

This view of sign without subject in fact limits
the scope of investigation into human social behaviour.

In fact, semiotic inquiry will become an exercise in logic, detached from the realm of human action. Bhattacharya (1979) makes the point clearly when he says that:

> The real world may indeed exist even if there were no one to perceive it, but signs do not exist without perceivers ... For signs, to exist is to be perceived (p. 319).

However, this does not diminish the importance of the other variable in the correlation, which is, at least initially, external to the subject. Perception does not take place except there is something to be perceived.

This emphasis on subjectivity has brought the question of the nature of the sign into sharp focus and some claim that meaning cannot even be thought about outside of the context of human action. Kristeva (1976) for example, feels that semiotic inquiry should be concerned not with the examination of signification but, rather, with the trangression from these pre-existing structures which occur at the pre-symbolic level of consciousness. Thus, according to Kristeva, drives and needs which occur at the deeper level of consciousness should be accessed semiotically and held up for analysis against the background of socially contrived structures of signification.

Although, the subject has to be a necessary

consideration in any inquiry into meaning, it seems problematic to approach it exclusively from this standpoint for two principal reasons. Firstly, the idea of transgression is not intelligible in the absence of a pre-existing system. An individual is born into a web of signifying practices which are organised by the social group in which s/he eventually becomes a member and in order to signify at all as an individual s/he must have recourse to the repertoire of practices that is available. Secondly, and relatedly, the notion of inquiry itself suggests purposive-rational behaviour on the part of the inquirer. Also, it is presumed that the object of inquiry has some patterned make-up and as such even idiosyncratic behaviour is put in terms of some structure. Thus a good question would be: How would those semioticians who make a study of idiosyncratic sign behaviour represent their findings to the community of scholars? Their arguments must be couched in a way that is intelligible and it is not unlikely that they would have to use some system of signification which will have to be intelligible to those with whom they communicate the results of inquiry.

This question about the subject and existing structures is also reflected in the debate on signification and communication which is equiavlent to

the Saussurean twin concepts of 'langue' and 'parole' and the same point applies for it is difficult to study one without the other. As Eco puts it:

> It is possible, if not perhaps particularly ·
> desirable, to establish a semiotics of signi-
> fication independently of a semiotics of commu-
> nication: but it is impossible to establish a
> semiotics of communication without a semiotics
> of signification (1976, p. 9).

But the allegation of the denial of the subject is not entirely true with Peirce and Barthes because they both did imply the role of the subject by the dynamism inherent in the interpretant and the idea of connotation, respectively. It will also be remembered that Peirce logically extended the notion of the interpretant to the the idea that symbols both grow and change meanings across situations.

Such an assertion can be understood more clearly in the light of the suggestion that both icons and indices contribute to the growth of the symbol. Further, it suggests a sort of ontology which may be explained in terms of Barthes' notions of denotation a   no ation. Barthes, confines this notion to the conc   but this conceals the potential of this idea   ift when it is generalised to all kinds of   r. For, it can easily be argued that the s   ift from denotation can result from any force and   only

the hegemonic motives of the bourgeois culture. To take this idea further, it is very possible that the polysemic character of connotation may stabilise into denotation which in turn becomes the basis for another round of connotative action. This movement from denotation to connotation to denotation is semiosis par excellence in Peircean terms.

Another useful idea to be derived from Peirce's semiotics is the classification of signs. Inquiry can hardly proceed without some form of naming mechanism for putting disparate observations in some kind of order. Since the object of semiotics is signs, such a mechanism is clearly necessary for dealing with the presumed variety of signs which come into play in social interaction. It is here that the taxonomy of signs becomes valuable, at least initially, for speaking in more cogent terms about signifying practices. Testimony to this usefulness of the Peircean categories can be seen in their widespread use (especially the icon, index, and symbol) among semioticians.

Of course, as was said before, there are problems with the integrity of the classes but this does not take away from the essential idea that signs can in fact exist in different forms. Eco (1986) puts an interesting construction on the utility of the classification when

he says that:

> The items of Peirce's celebrated trichotomy are
> not <u>types of signs</u> but rather <u>semiotic
> categories</u> by which one can describe more com-
> plex strategies of signification (p.177).

This is a very useful perception in that the inquirer is allowed more flexibility in the conception of the categories as signifying orientations rather than signs.

Language and Semiotics

From all that has been said so far about semiotics it is quite obvious that language is only one of the many signifying systems that exist in the social situation. However, much of semiotic inquiry and discussion has been carried within the conceptual frames of linguistic thought. Part of this tendency seems to derive from the Saussurean notion that linguistics be appointed the 'patron general' of semiology and also the Barthesian notion that semiology as a discipline cannot exist outside of the linguistic frame.

Now, language is one of the most developed social systems and as a result, the field of linguistics has managed to develop as a highly articulated domain of inquiry; so much so that its methods have been adopted by other social sciences. For example, Claude Levi-Strauss, an anthropologist, has used the methods of structural linguistics for investigation into cultural

forms such as Kinship and myth (1985, p. 110-128).

Benveniste, another linguist, in discussing the relationship of language to other sign sytems accords the former a privileged position because it is the only one which can describe itself and all others.

> The signs of a society can be interpreted
> integrally those of language, but the re-
> verse is no so. Language is therefore the
> interpreting system of society (1985, p.235).

He goes further to make the telling inference that :

> ... semiotic subsystems internal to the society
> are logically interpreted by language, since
> society contains them and society is interpreted
> by language (ibid, p. 236).

Thus language is indispensable not only to semiotics but also to social life because it tells society about itself.

This privileged position of language over other sign systems is, however, not only attributable to the success of linguistics. More fundamentally, it derives from more general ideas about the relationship of language to thought. The most influential notion in this regard, is the famous Sapir/Whorf hypothesis on linguistic relativity which claims that thought cannot be achieved in any meaningful sense without language and, by extension, reality is inaccessible without it (language).

Wilden (1981) finds another explanation for the

hegemony of language in the realm of metaphysics. He makes the point that it has been accorded a special status as the link between the voice of deity and man. As is seen for example in the case of the ten commandments given to man by the scrolls on a tablet of stone.

While it cannot be denied that language is at the moment dominant among other sign systems, the idea that it is coterminous with thought is unacceptable, since thinking indeed takes place in the absence of language. Furth (1983) for example, has shown that thought and concept formation do indeed take place up to a significant level among deaf children without language. It only has to be remembered, too, that language is a closed finite system whereas thought is immaterial and infinite because of its temporality, to reject the notion that thought is coterminous with language.

Nadin expresses the point in more concrete terms by showing that the credibility and power of language is being reduced by the emergence of other sign systems within the culture and these latter systems "even limit language's sphere of action" (op. cit. p. 377). This scenario suggested by Nadin can be easily corroborated by a cursory look at the communications environment of most societies today and it also underlines the point

that the linguistic model cannot be taken for granted by those who inquire into signifying practices in social life.

Indeed, it can be argued that too much reliance on this model can obstruct semiotic inquiry since there are a number of profound differences between the linguistic sign and others. In the first place, language as a process tends to be linear in shape. One speaks reads writes and listens in a fixed linear sequence, but this is clearly not the case with many other social sign systems. Consider, for example, a picture. Its 'reading' can be done from many different directions and if it is at all possible to speak about the syntax of a picture, one can say that it will be quite different from that of language.

Another important difference between language and other sign systems is that the latter tend to have "extrasign instrumental materiality" (Petrelli, op. cit), meaning that these sign systems tend to have a nonsign function in addition to their signifying properties. Language, on the other hand signifies purely and tends to have more semantic fixity, thus making for greater uniformity in interpretation. It is interesting that most of the advocacy for the deconstruction of semiotics comes from Europe where the linguistic model with its

fixity is dominant.

All of this is not to say that the linguistic model is not useful for semiotic inquiry at this point in time. To deny this will be to reject the contributions of Saussure and Barthes. However, serious consideration needs to be given to the role that averbal systems play, both independently and in concert with language, in signifying practices.

Again, Peirce's semiotics plays a directive role on two counts. Firstly, because his semiotics is not modelled on language, verbal and averbal systems are treated with equal emphasis and neither is given a position of privilege. Secondly, because of the recognised mutual influence that the different classes of signs have on each other, the inquirer is in a position to consider how they come together to signify in a complex way. However, Peirce merely shows the posssibility for the co-functioning of verbal and other signs, but, apart from his general programme of discovering meanings, he gives no guidelines for actual inquiry.

Barthes (1985) does exactly this in his discussions on the rhetoric of the image. Using the example of a photographic image, he demonstrates a method he calls 'spectral analysis'. He shows how the

signification of an image operates both independently and in combination with the linguistic message. For example he show how the linguistic message serves the functions of 'relay' and 'anchor' for the message of the image (p. 196-198). It may be said again that Barthes is still at the level of signification, but he nevertheless provides a more than useful frame for approaching this very important relationship between verbal and averbal signs.

The Scope of Semiotics

As a prerequisite to the task of applying semiotic to the the social domain, it is imperative to delimit as best as possible its scope relative to the task. This means that questions about its substantive and methodological power to investigate signifying practices will have to be answered. The delimiting of this scope seems to revolve around three basic and related issues: a) the areas of social life where semiotic inquiry has relevance; b) the mechanisms the semiotics as a field of inquiry seems to contain for generating understandings about these areas of life; and c) the validity of these understandings for future action.

The discussion of the semiotic field so far would suggest it to be some sort of panepistemic capable of

subsuming all existing areas of knowledge. This perceived scope is, significantly, co-extensive with (or even derived from) the the ubiquitous nature of the sign. This perception clearly comes from the Peircean idea that signs are everywhere and each one has the potential to produce another.

Consistent with this notion of the sign, Eco(1976) carves out a vast domain for the semiotic enterprise in presenting a bewildering array of sites where semiotic inquiry is relevant. Within this compendium he includes: Zoosemiotics, Olfactory signs, Tactile Communication, Cultural Codes, Codes of Taste and many others (p. 9-14).

Culler (op. cit.) sees this delineation as "amusing in its very disorder" (p. 34), and as a reflection of the disarray in which semiotics finds itself:

> As this list makes abundantly clear, one of the major tasks that semiotics must face is to organize itself. This is in fact its primary concern, since it involves determining what are the principal varieties of sign and how they relate to one another (p. 34).

While this criticism may be valid insofar as semiotics is yet to understand itself, Culler gives the impression from his assertion that the enterprise has to do only with the classification of signs.

Such a position is epistemologically unsound since the scope of an area of inquiry cannot be determined

solely by its object. Obviously, there are other aspects constitutive of scope since the object gets its being from the interactional context in which it is located.

Though Eco (1976) seems at the moment ambitious about the scope of semiotics, he sees it as more than just a sign chase; he sees it as having the power to permit the understanding of culture and posits an hypothesis which makes " a general theory of culture out of semiotics and in the final analysis makes semiotics a substitute for cultural anthropology" (p. 27). He sees this project as possible since every aspect of culture is a semantic unit. Hence, signs are now located in a cultural (not natural) reality, thus becoming constitutive of that reality.

But it is conceivable that just as signs are everywhere in the universe they can be everywhere in the culture, creating the same problems with too expansive a scope. It is perhaps true that culture can be seen essentially as a communication system; or, as Even-Zohar (1985) puts it, "an aggregate of signifing possibilites". But the semiotic enterprise is not any less manageab for all this because it is left in the vast expanse of culture without form or organisation.

Saussure's position on the scope of semiotic in the social realm is more useful since he narrows down the

project to deal only with conventional sign systems. But apart from his neglect of emergent sign systems, he does not consider the social matrix as a significant determiner of this scope. Rather, he portrays it as a sort of neutral backdrop to signifying practices. Barthes provides the corrective by addressing all social practices and discusses the nature of signification against the operation of the social matrix as is seen in his notion of myth.

Rossi-Landi (1979) takes a position similar to Barthes (but goes farther) when he couches semiotic inquiry within the social materialist framework. He calls for a materialist semiotics to be founded on social reality which is made up of the interaction between men and with natu█He goes on to say that semiotics

> ...cannot examine sign systems apart from the
> social processes with which they are function-
> ing all along. It cannot make everything rest
> on signs themselves (p. 122).

What Rossi-Landi underlines here is the impropriety of determining the scope of semiotics by signs themselves. But he has a specific notion about the setting within which sign systems are located. He contends that the best way of describing social reality is in terms of social reproduction which, according to him, is

> ... the totality of processes by which society
> ... proceeds in time, preserving itself while
> at the same time administering some changes to
> its own internal structure (p.122).

From this basic position he articulates the scope of

semiotics as follows:

> Semiotic studies are deeply involved in the
> study of social reproduction. In fact social
> reproduction is also necessarily, the repro-
> duction of all sign systems (p. 122).

The scope of semiotics here outlined by Rossi-Landi

presents a clear framwework for application to social

inquiry and this is especially so because he considers

the nature of the social situation in which signs are

used and produced. It is very difficult to deny that

societies/cultures do not merely exist. If this were

so then the humans who create them would be like the

nonhuman organisms which cannot separate themselves from

nature in order to act upon it. Societies/cultures

actively engage in labour to achieve certain goals which

have to be achieved in order for them to continue to

survive. And one thing they do is try to reproduce

themselves. For, once certain basic processes that

constitute them are not reproduced, they will disappear

(Rossi-Landi, op cit. p.122).

This particular view of society has been criticised

as being too mechanistic in that it presents the human

being as a malleable object passing through the mould of

fixed social mechanisms. The opponents of the view therefore call for a greater emphasis on the autonomy of the individual as s/he interacts with the pre-existing structures.

Subjectivity/Objectivity and Semiotics

Underlying this tension between the role of the indivdual and that of social structures is the classical epistemological debate between two polarised schools of thought concerning the way inquiry into human behaviour should proceed. These two positions have been respectively called subjectivist and objectivist. Briefly put the the subjectivist approach to inquiry holds that knowledge about reality can only be derived from the insights and intuition of the human mind reflecting on itself, whereas the objectivist approach sees reality as an orderly entity existing independently of the human mind and as such knowledge is only possible through observation of this external reality. Parret (1983) describes the subjectivist approach as follows:

> ... the knowing subject or auto-reflexive consciousness is the 'conditio sine qua non' for any possible structuring of the ontological systematicity (p. 6).

On the other hand the objectivist approach aims to

> ... grasp the structure of reality as a set of objects, state of affairs and events pre-

> existing autonomously and independently of
> any intellectual or reflective reconstruc-
> tion (p. 6).

Hints of this polarity have already been seen in the call for the role of the subject to be considered as a constitutive part of the sign relation in the case of Saussure and Barthes and for a real (not logical) subject in the case of Peirce.

As far as semiotics is concerned the sign is mediation between the subjectivity of the human mind and the objective external world and therefore bridges the divide between the two polar positions. Indeed with semiotics as a field of inquiry each of these positions tend to lose its relevance. Parret sees this situation in a similar way when he asserts that semiotics is the third stage in a succession of three paradigms, the other two being objectivism and subjectivism, which he locates conceptually between the previous two:

> At the very least, according to this paradigm,
> it is the sign function which is the possi-
> bility condition of the interpretation of the
> world and especially of the subjective validity
> of this interpretation. The sign-function is,
> in fact, a mediating function between the inter-
> preter (p. 6).

At a very basic level Parret is saying that both objectivity and subjectivity are impossible in the absence of the mediation of the sign.

Peirce's notion of the sign best exemplifies the

irrelevance of the subject/object dichotomy. Although he places much emphasis on externality, he is unable to escape the role of the subject in the sign, even if it is a 'could-be' one. In the sign relations, we see the merging of the ground (firstness of consciousness) with the external object to produce the interpretant of the sign. Thus we have the complementarity of the subject and object to produce a sign. In fact, Peirce makes a very significant point in this regard when he asserts that the sign does not permit direct apprehension of the object but only represent it (But the sign cannot exist without the object).

But despite the suggestion that semiotics presents a way out of the subject/object dilemma, there is a group of semioticians who are making a strong call for semiotic inquiry to be cast into the objectivist mode (Pearson and Bouissac (1983)) for example. Bouissac is most vigourous in his advocacy for a more rigourously 'scientific' approach to semiotic inquiry. In an article (1983a), he expresses extreme dissatisfation with the epistemological status of semiotics suggesting that the models and other intellectual devices being used in the field have become anachronistic by their sheer intuitiveness.

He feels that semiotics should seek new models

from the physical science field, especially neurology, in order to avoid the cul-de-sac which semiotic inquiry faces. Bouissac (1983b) exemplifies the use of this approach in his discussion on the concept of iconicity. He tries to show that the idea of similarity which has been always basic to the concept, no longer has explanatory power since he claims that it is based on intuition and philosophical speculation. He suggests the use of information from the brain sciences which seem to hold more palpable promise for research into the concept.

Now Bouissac's position is extremely objectivist and seems to be suggesting a physical sciences methodology for semiotics in order to remove the apparent subjectivity in inquiry in favour of a more direct approach to the object of inquiry. It would be a serious breach of the semiotic principle to ignore any kind of meaning which might further understanding. Therefore, if the scientific approach to iconicity can do this then it will have to be considered from a semiotics point of view in order to decide its usefulness. Thus Bouissac's plea may be somewhat exaggerated because he does not have a problem with semiotic inquiry per se.

Bouissac's problem seems to be with his idea of the

way semiotic inquiry should be conducted, how inquirers should go about observing phenomena. It would seem that for him observation should attempt to get at things in themselves without the mediation of the human mind. This reliance on the trancendency of the method of investigation will, in fact, be a negation of the semiotic enterprise since the fate of meaning cannot be decided in a site outside the human mind.

For what it is worth, Bouissac should be reminded that the theory of signs has been developed by a man who was considered to be at the forefront of science in his time. He must also be reminded that the theory of signs was developed to facilitate scientific inquiry. Semiotic aims to study all those meanings the emerge from the human encounter with the object world (which includes the field of the physical sciences) by addressing the signs which represent the interpretations resulting from the encounter. As such its project cannot be the futile one of trying to unify the knower with the known, simply because there is no known outside the human mind where everything that is observed has to be interpreted and expressed as knowledge. In fact, semiotics deals fundamentally with interpretation.

Interpretation

Peirce's main key to the idea of interpretation is the interpretant which is the third term in the sign relation that bind together the ground and the object. As was said before, the interpretant is not a subject but rather a possible action by an hypothetical subject. In fact the interpretant may be correctly called an interpretation. Further, the whole proces of interpretation may be seen in terms of the sign relations.

Considered from the perspective of the three categories of consciousness, the ground is the possibilty condition for the coming into consciousness of the object and the relationship of these two terms is articulated into the interpretant or thirdness. This latter completes the circle of the interpretation and at the same time provides ground for the next process of interpretation. Of course, this is the process involved in the sign relation, but it can be applied to more complex situations.

Bucznysk-Garewicz (1983), in a discussion of the Peircean notion of the sign as interpretation, posits five basic features about the process which may be put as follows:

1. Interpretation is not concerned with the search for a perfect beginning since there is no 'primodial world'. Indeed it is interpretation which 'constitutes the world for itself and by itself; and it is never possible to go behind this'.

2. The defining characteristic of interpetation is continuity, assured by the triadic nature of the sign.

3. Interpretation is a process in time and although is part of the passage of time in a general sense , it has its own relative, temporal structure.

4. Interpretation is a creative process insofar as it engenders meaning. Thus "there is no uninterpreted meaning".

5. For interpretation the world is a text to be interpreted. Nothing is self-given, "but everything that appears speaks about something else and everything needs interpretation in new terms.

6. There is nothing inherent about interpretation which deals with correctness or incorrectness. Thus any evaluative criteria will be attached exogenously (p.42-43).

The first four features are quite straightforward and consistent with the sign relations, but the final two bear some comment as they introduce some important issues in the application of the idea of interpretation to the process of social inquiry. In proposition 5., Bucznysk-Garewicz introduces the idea of text by saying that the world is a text waiting to be interpreted. Now, the notion of the text is an indispensable part of any current discussion on interpretation and it is in order to pay it some attention.

Ricoeur (1985) in his discussion on developing a theory of interpretation, uses the Peircean notion of the sign to conceptualise the text. He sees the text as the object in the sign relation which he describes as follows in the context of interpretation:

> ... we can say that the open series of inter-
> pretants, which is grafted on to the relation
> of a sign to an object, brings to light a
> triangular relation of object-sign-interpre-
> tant; and the latter relation can serve as a
> model for another triangle which is constituted
> at the level of the text (p. 163).

Apart from one terminological difference, Ricoeur's notion of the sign relation as analogous to the process of interpretation is quite like the one previously discussed. But because he raises the idea of the text, this important concept will be discussed a little more.

Now, what is very significant is Ricoeur's idea that the completed relations of the sign serve as a model for process of interpretation which is constituted at the level of the text. Thus, we get the notion that the text as secondness is not an amorphous entity awaiting structure at the level of the interpretant. Rather, the text as object is already structured by the model which is the ground (or firstness) that has been generated by the previous relation.

This point is very important for interpretation

in social inquiry since it raises the idea that the social situation to be studied semiotically is not an open text, but, rather, one that has already been outlined in some way by firstness. Thus it is impossible for the inquirer to approach a text as a 'tabula rasa because his consciousness as a social-pschological being already carries the posibility for structure when the text is approched.

For this reason, it is difficult to agree with Bucznysk-Garewicz (op. cit.) sixth proposition above that there are no evaluative criteria inherent in the nature of interpretation. For surely, if we accept that the text is in some way outlined by the ground, then clearly, one of the functions of its subsequent interpretation is, at least, to include or exclude elements relative to that outline. To accept a conception of interpretation without inherent evaluative criteria is, effectively, to return to the notions about pure reason.

Consistent with the idea of the pre-structuring of the text, Ricoeur presents the process of interpretation as a circle where there is an unbreakable dialectic between explanation and understanding towards interpretation. Understanding is a necessary prerequisite for the explanation of the text, but at the

same time "Understanding is entirely mediated by the whole of explanatory procedures which precede it and accompany it (p. 220). It is clear that even from this perspective, the Peircean notion of the sign relations underlies this paradigm for text-interpretation, a paradigm which can be easily applied to the social text.

Conclusion

The discussion of Peirce, Saussure and Barthes has given some clear directions for approaching social inquiry from a semiotic perspective. Firstly, the notion of the sign as an expression of meaning sets the stage where social text may be understood as a complex of mediated actions where the exchange of messages is initiated and maintained through the very relations of the sign (semiosis in the Peircean sense and, perhaps in a more oblique way, connotation in the Barthesian sense).

Secondly, Saussure and Barthes have not only pointed to the fact that the mediated action is fundamentally social, but also that it is only possible through the pre-existence of codes which they refer to as langue' which in turn is constituted by social action itself. It is within this perspective we can understand the Peircean notion of the relationship between the ground and object. Barthes goes further, to

show that social signification is underlain by certain social intents which determine how the nature of the actual social mediation and in this regard the idea of myth is pertinent.

Thirdly, the Peircean classification of signs presents a useful frame for social inquiry on three counts: a) it makes for the orderly description of social action in semiotic terms; b) it presents directions for seeing and describing mediated action in other than verbal terms (which is something Barthes' notion of myth also provides); and c) by suggesting the necessary dependence between the three classes of signs, from firstness to thirdness, the classification provides a scheme for examining mediated behaviour in ontological terms.

Fourthly, all of the three, Peirce, Saussure and Barthes suggest methods by which inquiry into the social text may proceed. Peirce through his phenomenological categories as reflected in his conception of the sign provides an interpretative scheme for approaching and understanding meaning both from the point of view of the inquirer and observed human action. This scheme sets up a hermeneutic circle, to use Ricoeur's term, which effectively breaks down the dichotomy of the subjectivist/objectivist approach to inquiry. Peirce's

also emphasises the responsibility of the inquirer to the community to which he belongs and this is carried out in the respect for intersubjectivity within fields of inquiry. Barthes and Saussure, show ways of analysing the pre-existing order by: a) separating 'langue', from parole'; and b) by the use of other structuralist techniques which, though characterised by immanence, are quite suitable to the analysis of any strutured object.

These directions offered by these semiotic perspectives cannot be regarded as a complete programme for the interpretation of the social text since the major shortcoming of all the ideas was the neglect of their actual process of the emergence of meaning. Put in other words, the question of what the pre-existing structures, which the subject must necessarily encounter, actually mean to that subject needs to be addressed as an essential part of the semiotic enterprise.

Despite these apparent shortcomings, it cannot be doubted that Saussure, Barthes and Peirce offers some powerful strategic and tactical resources with which one can approach social inquiry in general. By extension, and perhaps moreso, these semiotic ideas present clear indications as to how inquiry into the curriculum domain might proceed. Therefore the task of the final chapter

is to develop an outline of how this can be done.

Chapter 6

A Semiotic Approach to Curriculum Inquiry

The whole argument towards a semiotic approach to curriculum inquiry has, up to this point, proceeded along two lines. On the one hand, there has been an attempt to establish a ground as a starting point for inquiry; and this was done by conceptualising the curriculum domain as an interactional field with the category of content located at the centre. On the other hand, the semiotic theories of Saussure, Barthes and Peirce were explored in an effort to discover conceptual and methodological devices for revealing the form and substance of the interactional field.

The aim of this final chapter is to outline a synthesis of these two lines of argument which will result in a semiotic approach to curriculum inquiry. It is intended that this outline will be applied to the practical task of describing and explaining the nature of the curriculum domain.

This task will be divided into four sections: 1. A number of basic principles, derived from the discussions on both semiotics and the curriculum field, will be put forward as basic assumptions on which the outline will be developed.

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2. Two types of curriculum studies will be examined with a view to integrating them into the outline as possible supplements to the semiotic ideas already discussed. These will be: a) those studies which deal with semiotic issues but are not referred to as semiotic; and b) those which have agendas which are explicitly labelled as semiotic.

3. A conceptual strategy for semiotic inquiry into the curriculum will be articulated, showing how critical aspects of the inquiry - content, signs and interpretation - will be dealt with.

4. The tactical aspect of the inquiry will then be outlined, using the content area of Home Economics from the curriculum of a formal institution as illustration.

Guiding Assumptions

In light of the previous discussions and analyses on both the semiotic and the curriculum domain, it is necessary to state some principles which should serve as a sort of philosophical guide for the conduct of semiotic inquiry into curriculum. These will have to do with: a) the scope of the semiotic approach that will be used; b) the social nature of the curriculum domain; c) the question of systematicity and discourse; the classification of signs; and interpretation with the

corresponding concept of intersubjectivity.

Scope of the Semiotic Approach

As far as this present study is concerned, the scope of semiotics will be limited to the application of concepts from the semiotic theories of the three semioticians discussed in the two previous chapters. The aim is not to extend its scope into theory building since the interest is in understanding the curriculum domain rather than in building semiotic theory.

This sort of approach is, in fact, quite common among those who are interested in the semiotic field since they are interested in seeing how semiotics may help in the understanding of their substantive fields of inquiry.

Pelc (1983) describes this basic approach when he examines the ways in which semiotic inquiry has been conceived among those with an interst in the field. This approach is referred to by Pelc as "applied semiotics" which is done

> ... when the method of interpretation is
> applied not   a single thing event or pheno-
> menon but to a certain complex thereof, a set
> forming a whc   particularly a systematized
> whole (p. 27)

He goes on to sa   the characteristic feature of semiotics is that "it   ives to uncover the meaning of

the investigated reality" (p.27).

With this study, the curriculum domain has already been articulated in a provisional way as a complex of interactions and it is to this whole that the semiotic ideas of Peirce, Saussure and Barthes will be applied. These three figures clearly provide almost ready-made schemes for this kind of application since Peirce provides, most of all, · the taxonomy of signs for labelling the various phenomena in the curriculum domain while Saussure and Barthes have suggested very specific ways in which social sign systems may be studied. Indeed, it may be said that the works of these three semioticians are as such that they may be re-interpreted to suit the particular task at hand (for example Barthes notion of connotation which was re-interpreted in Chapter 3).

Additionally, as an essential part of this applied approach, instances of curriculum inquiry considered as having semiotic import will be integrated into the general framework. This will be done with a view to strengthening those parts of this framework which turn out to be deficient. This will be dealt with in a later section.

The Curriculum as a Social Domain

The essentially social nature of the curriculum domain needs to be reiterated at this point as a guiding principle for the development of the outline.

It is axiomatic that the curriculum domain is a social entity, but it is not enough to state this as a bald fact. Once a domain for investigation is described as social, then it becomes necessary to describe the nature of the social context in which this domain is located in order to ensure the adequacy of the investigation (Anyon, 1981).

Rossi-Landi (op. cit) and many others have suggested that the best way to describe the social context is as an entity trying to reproduce itself through its basic constitutive processes. Education is clearly one of those processes and, in fact, most explicitly so. It follows then, that curriculum, which is at the heart of the education process will reflect the reproductive intent of its social matrix.

Now, it must be pointed out that reproduction here is being seen at the level of intent since because of the dynamism of human agency, it is possible that these intents will not be realised. This is the basis of the argument of the Resistance Theory which opposes the idea of describing society as reproductive (Giroux, 1983).

Thus, even though society will be initially described as reproductive, the validity of that position must await the account of how the human subject interacts with the expressions of those intents. As was said many times before, this is where the inadequacies of the three semioticians discussed come to the fore: they have not treated this question of the response to the systems of signification. Consequently, alternative strategies will have to be devised to deal with this problem as inquiry proceeds.

Systematicity, Text and Discourse

Following from the assumption that the curriculum has a particular purpose, is the idea that the domain will be systematically organised as actors play out their particular intentions within it. In such a way the sign behaviour which makes up the domain will be expected to be structured and susceptible to systematic analysis. Therefore, the curriculum domain will not be regarded as a text composed of non-ostensive references' but as text-as-discourse' in which the actors and other elements will be important aspects of its explanation and interpretation (Ricoeur, op. cit.).

Further, it will be assumed that this text-as-discourse in its expression and constitution will have a

possible relationship of entailment with the social matrix. As such, this matrix will be the point of reference for the explanation of the semiotic phenomena within the curriculum domain. In other words, this social matrix will be site of the depth semantic which this semiotic enterprise seeks to uncover.

As a corollary to this notion of systematicity in social organisation, the signifying activities constitutive of the curriculum domain, will be conceived as organised patterns of behaviour, susceptible to orderly and systematic analysis. This assumption is indispensable to the meaningful conduct of inquiry, since the very notion of inquiry is inconceivable in the absence of order and systematicity.

Differentiation of Signs

It will be assumed that the differentiation of signs will be an indispensable idea to the semiotic project as it is axiomatic that humans use different signs in different situations. Indeed, semiotic inquiry will be without substance if there is not the possibility of a repertoire of sign types available for use in society. As an extension to this, it may be said that the existence of social inquiry depends largely on the fact that humans have alternative choices in their

actions.

In semiotic inquiry, therefore, the enterprise can easily be seen to be founded on the fact that people choose certain types of signs from a repertoire of equally available alternatives. As a result, one important task of semiotic inquiry is to focus on the different ways in which signs appear in order to explain signifying activities on a more general level. In this regard, the classificatory s me of Peirce offers a more than adequate approac dealing with this differentiation of signs.

Interpretation and Intersubjectivity

It is to be presumed that inquiry is undertaken partly because a particular member of a scholarly community wishes to present his/her understanding and interpretation of an object situation to that community for scrutiny. Indeed, it will be right to say that serious inquiry only takes place within the context of such a community whether it is real or imagined by the inquirer (McCutcheon, 1981). To take this point further, it may be said that ultimately the inquirer depends on his community in his quest for understanding. It is therefore easy to see why much effort is spent on the elaboration of inquiry procedures and the communication of results. Indeed, it must not be forgotten that Peirce

attempted to articulate his theory of sign to facilitate communication within the scholarly community.

The immediate implication of this concern with intersubjectivity is the need to adopt a more accommodating approach to the different types of inquiry. This point is especially valid in the light of the dissipation of the subject/object distinction by the semiotic paradigm.

Further, the notion of intersubjectivity, highlights the fact that all inquiry is basically an exploration into interpretation as the inquirer derives meaning from what is observed and expresses this meaning by means of signs. Thus, whether meaning is expressed in statistical or any other form it must be recognised that it has significative value as the expression of the interpretation of some event.

In the case of semiotic inquiry into the curriculum, it will be assumed that it can be undertaken using all of the existing modes of inquiry, which are identified by McCutcheon (op. cit.) as phenomenological, positivistic and critical scientific. McCutcheon sees these three types of inquiry as forming a triangle where the activity of inquiry can be placed at any side, depending on the stage and aim of inquiry. For example, if there is the need to find out what a particular event

means to a subject, a phenomenological approach will be more appropriate while the critical science model will be more appropriate if particular expressed meanings are being interpreted in the light of some theoretical position (p. 5). What is very interesting here is that McCutcheon's categories seem to parallel those of firstness (phenomenological), secondness (positivistic) and thirdness (critical scientific). Once again we see the heuristic potential of Peirce's work to the conduct of inquiry.

Curriculum Inquiry with Semiotic Interest

Curriculum inquiry has to do fundamentally with the the study of meaning since its object domain is, in fact, constituted by the exchange of messages between its interacting parts. Despite this this inquiry has, for a significant period, not been self-consciously oriented toward the problem of meaning.

If curriculum inquiry is seen in terms of the phases outlined by Pinar et al.(op. cit.) - traditionalist, conceptual-empiricist and reconceptualist - it can be easily seen that the two first phases have been more concerned with the outcomes of the curriculum process as a more or less predictable result of highly organised inputs. The focus was really

on learning rather than meaning and, though this may seem to be a meaningless distinction, it becomes intelligible when one considers that the processual aspect of learning was neglected in favour of the overt manifestations of a response to the inputs.

The question of meaning really came into focus when curriculum inquiry began to reconsider the effectiveness of the empiricistic conceptual frame which had dominated it up to the late sixties (Pinar et al. op. cit. p. 6-7). Drawing on Marxist and phenomenological traditions, curriculum inquiry now began to address the influences of the wider society on individual and selected groups. It began to examine the way that existing social structures constrained action at the level of schooling in order to produce certain outcomes which were oppressive for the actors. Thus the question of meaning became central not only in terms of what these structures signified but also in terms of the response of the groups and individuals to them.

At the conceptual level of curriculum inquiry, there has been a number of studies that have addressed the question of how the signification of these structures have generated certain metaphors which have guided curriculum thought. For example, the movement away from the scientistic approach to curriculum inquiry

was motivated partly by the notion that it reinforced the technocratic rationality that dominating structures used to minimise the _____ of the human subject in social process (Apple and _____, 1982). Kliebard(198), in fact, calls for the conceptualisation of curriculum theory as a metaphor in order to get a more dynamic perspective on the process of theory building.

At the level of practice, the idea of the metaphor is still applied in curriculum inquiry. Hyman (1974) shows how certain metaphors, in general, constrain the teacher's interaction with students in significant ways and suggests that undesirable ones such as those from industry and manufacturing should be avoided.

Sociolinguistics and Curriculum Inquiry

In a more general approach to language the question of meaning has been most directly addressed by the sociolinguistic perspective of language interaction in the classroom. Barnes (1969) has shown how the teacher uses language to dominate classroom interaction in such a way that s/he controls what the students learn.

Bernstein (1975) presents a well-articulated theory of meaning in the context of learning. His thesis is that social origins determine the kind of language that is commonly used by student, and as such, language codes

are developed specific to social class, which in fact reinforces socialisation within that class. He goes further to say that the language of education is more consistent with that used by the more privileged groups within the society.

Consequently, given the importance of language to cognitive development and academic success, the lower class child is at a disadvantage in the educational situation. Bernstein, creates a typology, of the codes specific to the social groups - the restricted code, and the elaborated code. The former tends to be particularistic or context-bound and used more by the lower class groups, while the latter is more universalistic and context-free. Subsequent research by his students (Holland, 1977, for example) has tended to remove the sharpness of the typology and they are now thought of as orientations to language use rather than strict codes.

There has also been a number of studies which have been concerned with meaning in the context of curriculum content and these again try to show how schooling is related to society in such a way that the presentation of knowledge reinforces the external social structures. Some have shown how the form and content of certain textbooks reinforce traditional conceptions of male and

female roles within the society; others have shown the biases in history texts have presented the world view of the dominant group in societies.

Barnes (1976) in a wide-ranging study, explores the communication strategies used by both teachers and students in the teaching-learning situation. He does this against the background of a number of theoretical positions like those of Alfred Schutz and Basil Bernstein. More specifically, subject matter is always identified as the common object around which the communication takes place.

From this study, Barnes arrives at a number of interesting concepts having to do with meaning and knowledge. Notable are two referred to as transmission and interpretation teacher. These refer to two positions constituted by views about the teaching and learning of a particular content. For example, the transmission teacher sees it as his task to transmit knowledge and to test the students' mastery of that knowledge. The interpretation teacher feels that the students' ability to interpret knowledge is more important.

On a more concrete level, Apple (1982) shows how innovation in the organisation of curriculum content disorients the professional self of the teacher by forcing him/her to transform his/her craft to suit the

technological rationality implied in the new packaged materials. Apple sees this as a form of control by those who plan curriculum outside of the teaching site.

The work of Eisner (1982) must also be mentioned here as an example of the preoccupation with meaning among inquirers. In a response to the 'Back-to-the-Basics' movement, Eisner declares that the notion of basic education as confined to literacy and numeracy is erroneous. He argues that there are other crucial components of basic education that ought to be taken into consideration. The advocacy in Eisner's work is for greater emphasis on those aspect of knowledge which cannot be expressed in terms of words or figures, namely, averbal aesthetic forms and which constitute a significant part of human experience.

As an elaboration of this basic argument Eisner deals with forms of representation, the ways that individuals use to make private experience public and accessible. After listing the many ways that experience is represented, he goes on to explain three modes in which these forms of representation may be treated: the mimetic, the expressive and the conventional. These correspond roughly to the concepts of icon, index and symbol . Based on the overall argument Eisner calls for a curriculum which will take into account not only

knowledge that is neither verbal nor numerical, but also in the different modes in which knowledge may be treated.

The work of Bruner (1964) must not be forgotten as a significant contribution to the exploration into meaning in the curriculum domain. Bruner has made the controversial assertion that anything may be taught to a person at any stage of intellectual development in an intellectually honest way. His view is based on the conviction that knowledge can be presented in three modes, one of which should correspond to the cognitive level of the learner whatever stage s/he is at.

His three modes of representation are labelled enactive', iconic' and 'symbolic . In the enactive mode, knowledge is represented to the learner through his/her own action. Pictures and diagrams are examples of iconic representation, while words and other symbols such as numbers are expressions of the symbolic mode. Bruner also makes the point that though these modes may correspond to certain levels of mental development each one can be used in any situation where it is necessary.

Finally, mention must be made of the work that is being done in the United Kingdom in the interactionist mode of social inquiry. It will not be far wrong to say that this work is a response to the theoretical posture

adopted by those Marxist sociologists (Young op. cit) who tried to show that the school served the reproductive interest of the wider society through curriculum content.

Thus the inquiry aims at uncovering the way students and teachers negotiate the meanings that are generated at all levels of the school environment. The outcome of this has been a spate of ethnographic studies trying to describe these meanings (already described in Chapter 2)

Semiotic Pertinence

All of the studies above are clearly concerned with the question of meaning and in a sense they may ,be called semiotic although they are not declared to be so. They are, however very pertinent to semiotic inquiry into the curriculum for two main reasons. Firstly, they can be reinterpreted in semiotic terms in order to build on this kind of inquiry. Secondly, and most relevant to this study, they can provide insight into the domain which can be integrated into semiotic interpretations.

It is apparent that most of the studies discussed can contribute, to a greater or lesser extent, to the present study. Some are useful for giving a clearer picture of the ground for inquiry by presenti

kinds of frame that the inquirer may have in approaching
the task of understanding the text. And here the work of
Apple and Taxel, is an example; some are useful for the
description of the text-as-discourse as they provide the
repertoire of ethnograpic works which deal specifically
with the human encounters·in the actual interactional
situation; and yet others, specifically Barnes,
Bernstein and Eisner present almost complete semiotic
accounts of the curriculum domain which provide
virtually all the aspects of a semiotic approach. Thus
all of these works will be considered in the outline of
the semiotic approach to inquiry.

Curriculum Inquiry called Semiotic

Despite the fact that curriculum inquiry is
fundamentally an exploration in meaning and the fact
that semiotics is the study of meaning through signs,
the semiotic approach to curriculum inquiry has not
received much explicit attention from curriculum
workers. Apart from a fledgling interest group on the
subject within the American Educational Research
Association, there is not much significant discourse
on the subject. However, there have been a few voices
suggesting directions for the application of semiotics
to curriculum thought and practice.

One very significant contribution is that by Wexler (1982). He calls for the application of the semiotics of Peirce and Saussure to the "critical sociology of knowledge" , the basis for understanding the curriculum domain. His reason for the semiotic approach is that:

> It makes it possible to understand knowledge
> production as a chain or series of transforma-
> tive activities which range from the social
> organization of text industries, to the acti-
> vities of text producers, through the symbolic
> transformation of the text itself, and to the
> transformative interaction between text and
> reader, or school knowledge and student (p.286).

This implies a rather full agenda for semiotic inquiry as Wexler traces the whole process of the knowledge from its social creation to the students' interaction at the level of schooling.

What is significant is that he emphasises process and transformation at all levels and is in a sense reflecting the diachrony and reflexivity that is characteristic of the critical scie reproduction to los objectivisation. He points out that:

> If cultural reproduction theory can become a
> new objectivism, semiotics can become a new
> idealism (p. 287).

Of course the caveat is in order but notions of objectivism and idealism cannot properly be a part of the semiotic enterprise if one is guided by the dynamic of the sign, as was discussed at length in the previous two chapters. What he does underline, however, is the need to develop strategies for dealing with semiotic processes during inquiry and this will be dealt' with in the outline of the strategy for semiotic inquiry.

Suhor (1984) proposes a model for curriculum based on its conceptualisation as a semiotic entity. Basic to this model is his idea of the "experiential store" possessed by every human being and which is described as

> ... a store of concepts, affects, and experiences
> that is indeterminate, undifferentiated, and
> unsymbolized (p.250).

The task of the semiotic model therefore is to generate alternative signs systems which will allow for the coding of this "pre-semiotic mental stuff" either for communication or inquiry within the educational situation.

Consequently, he proposes a number of alternative sign systems - linguistic, gestural, pictoral among others - as frames of references for curriculum building. What is significant is that Suhor

sees the linguistic system as the the connecting li❡k with all the other systems because "language is the primary organizer of human experience and is essential to virtually all school learning" (p. 252).

What stands out in this semiotic model for curriculum is that Suhor sees this curriculum as constitued by signs, rather than content areas expressed in signs. Such a view of curriculum, because it minimises the organising role of knowledge in the educational enterprise, is not completely adequate. Also, in a similar way as Saussure and Barthes, he sees the role of language as primary. Herein lies another difficulty with the model, since this primacy accorded to language can obstruct the semiotic enterprise.

Despite these reservations, Suhor's model introduces to the semiotic project a psychological dimension by referring to the work of Piaget and Carrol. These cannot be ignored as viable means for understanding and explaining curriculum as text. This is especially so, given the failure of the three semioticians to deal with the response of the subject to signification.

The two contributions above have been mentioned because they have presented models for semiotic inquiry , that are, in a sense, complete and present views which

are held to be important in the development of an approach.

Semiotics and Curriculum Inquiry: Strategy

The inquiry strategy will be outlined in terms of approaches to its different aspects which are: content; levels of meaning; the signs; the interpretive approach; and the inquiry tactic.

Approach to Content

Given the centrality of content in the conceptualisation of the groundings dealt with in Chapter 1, it will be crucial to have a clear picture of how it will be dealt with in the approach to inquiry. This must be fundamental since its treatment will determine how the rest of the interactional field will be constituted.

Firstly, content will be ocated within the framework of the position of Young and Bernstein. As such the relationship between it and the social matrix will be approached in terms of expressed preference for certain types of content by students and teachers, as well as other significant groups within the community. Thus it will be inferred that the more preferred types of content will have a greater social value.

Secondly, content will not be conceived only as

those referred to as the traditional disciplines. The notion must be extended to all those complexes of knowledge called subjects and which make up the official curriculum of the school. It does not matter whether the subjects are forms or fields of knowledge. Thus, categories such as Home Economics and other vocationally oriented subjects will be included.

It is for this reason that the immanent nature of the content will have to be analysed in order to see how it is constituted. The model of analysis will be derived from the ideas of Paul Hirst, which have been previously discussed in Chapter 3. Once this is done the inquirer will be in a position to see why certain complexes of knowledge are more socially valued than others.

Content: Levels of meanings

At another level of inquiry, the strategy will be to partition content into levels of meanings since it has different semantic value in different situations. Using the Peircean notions of ground, object and interpretant, it is possible to see content at three levels of meanings for the point of view of the inquirer.

At the first level, content can be seen as a structure which predates the entry of actors into the curriculum domain. Here content merely refers to the

bodies of knowledge that have been selected and organised for use in a curriculum situation. This level of meaning is similar to the Barthesian one of signification, but for our purposes it will be referred to as the level of "intended" meanings.

As far as the inquirer is concerned, this level of meaning must receive serious attention since it provided the ground, in the Peircean sense, for interaction at the next level of meaning. Thus, at this level of intended meanings the inquirer will undertake the analysis of the immmanent nature of the content as well as its social ramifications (for example, the target group for a particular type of content is intended).

The second level of meanings parallels the Peircean category of the object. At this level, the focus will be on the encounter of the actors with the content as the inquirer observes the dynamic of this encounter against the ground at the first level. This will be called the level of encountered meanings but it will be subdivided into two parts: a) that situation outside teaching/learning arena where the actors interact with the content (e.g. making a social evaluation of it through a questionnaire or some other form of interview); b) the actual teaching/learning situation when teachers try to teach and students try to learn a

particular content.

At the third level of meaning, the focus will be on the reflective aspect of meaning-making where the actors express the meaning they have derived, from the interactional situation. Basically, this level can be seen as a conscious bringing-together of the two other levels by the actors order to make sense of the experience derived from them. This level of meaning will be referred to as emergent meanings and parallels the interpretant in the Peircean sign relations. The scheme for these levels of meanings in relation to the three terms of the Peircean sign appears below.

Table 7. Content as levels of meaning

Level	Intended	Encountered	Emergent
Sign	Ground	Object	Interpretant

Once again it must be emphasised that these three levels of meanings are intertwined to create that complex which is content. In fact, in a global sense, content can be conceptualised as a sign when these three levels are seen in such a manner. This is illustrated below in Figure 2.

Figure 2. The Peircean Sign and Levels of Meanings

```
    Interpretant                   Emergent
        /\                            /\
       /  \                          /  \
      /    \                        /    \
     /_____\                      /_____\
Ground      Object    Intended            Encountered

     Sign                          Meanings
```
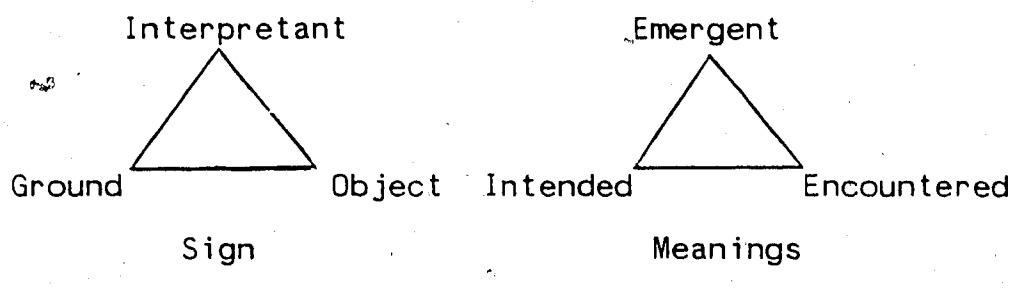
The above diagram illustrates the idea that intended meanings are in fact the possibility condition for the encounter and interaction with it. But these meanings are the ground which is to some extent constituted by a previous semiotic process, which, as far as this study is concerned, is the social value placed upon them. A very clear expression of this social value of different subjects may be seen in the system of preference where one content area of the curriculum is considered more important than another (High/low status according to Young, op. cit).

From the point of view of the student, the intended meanings are also the possibility condition for the encounter with it, but his/her ground may consist of the social prerequisites for the encounter; for example, previous knowledge or social selection. The object in the sign relation corresponds to the encountered

meanings in which the actors are confronted by content in the two contexts already mentioned. The interpretant, the level of thirdness, parallels the emergent meanings which evolve as the actors reflect on the encounter with the interactional situation against the ground of the first level of meanings.

These three levels may be regarded as coming together in a single coherent complex for interpretational purposes. But the partitioning also serves to provide opportunity for a more adequate analysis of content as it allows for different approaches to interpretation.

It must also be borne in mind that, at each level, all of the other entities which make up the interactional situation will also have to be considered since content is but one entity in the whole situation. Thus the relationship of the student to content will not only be studied at the level of encounter, but also at the level in intended meanings. For example, it will be of great value to know the type of student to whom the content is to be taught; or the social circumstances of the teachers who teach a particular type of content. All of this has to do with the task of interpretation which will be dealt with a little later on, but a very important part of the strategy will now be adressed - the

treatment of signs.

Approach to Signs

The sign is the essence of semiotic inquiry. It is the device that is used to get at the meanings which people generate in interaction. It is therefore necessary to say how signs may be conceptualised in this present approach to curriculum inquiry.

The major problem with the reliance on signs as the basis of the approach to inquiry is that of moving beyond a mere description of signifying activities to the explanation of the motives and consequences of these activities. It may be said that the ultimate purpose of social inquiry is the explanation of human action in terms of motives and consequences.

This problem may be approached by going back to the function of the sign in terms of the relationship it sets up between the subject and the object. If the sign functions to make the object available to the subject, then the focal point of that function is the spatio-temporal distance which the sign spans. In other words, the sign determines the nature of the relationship between the individual and external reality.

Peirce's notion of the sign, by its focus on its relationship to its object, makes the point a bit

clearer. The icon, index and symbol clearly imply different kind of relationships between the individual and reality. For example, the the indexical sign has no function in the absence of its object of reference. On the other hand, the symbol suggests a different spatio-temporal scheme, since it can function in the absence of the object it represents.

This line of argument can extend to the proposition that the meanings which signs express have to do with the relationship of the individual to the contextual situation in which s/he finds herself/himself. Or, put another way, meanings seem to be largely the way the world is organised in relation to the individual. Such an approach to the function of the sign, can move semiotic inquiry from a description of signs to the depth semantics of the motives behind the signs and the possible consequences of their functions.

Although Peirce's categories of signs clearly suggest how the individual is positioned in the world by the function of the different signs, they stop short at the level of classification. They do not get to the level of the depth semantics although directions are suggested for this. Once again, this is because Peirce does not go beyond signification to considerations about the actual use of signs.

Perhaps the most clearly articulated theory in this respect is that of Basil Bernstein (1975) which was discussed earlier in this chapter. Bernstein explicitly states that the restricted code, which tends to be context-specific, expresses particularistic meaning thereby setting up a relationship of contiguity between the individual and the world. On the other hand, the elaborated code tends to transcend context and expresses universalistic meanings. This therefore tends to make for the individual's freedom from the immediate context.

Such a scheme is quite consonant with two of Peirce's categories – the index (particularistic) and the symbol (universalistic). But this leaves the category of the iconic sign without such an explanation since it can neither be regarded as context-binding or context-transcending. However, if we follow the Peircean notion that the iconic sign is characterised by possibility, it becomes possible to locate the iconic sign in relation to both the indexical and symbolic situations.

As an illustration, consider the educational situation which purports to move the learner from the immediate context to some future situation. The symbolic representation of knowledge (in Bruner's sense) tends

toward greater abstraction \thereby permitting more freedom from the immediate context. On the other hand, the indexical representation tends be more concrete, thereby resulting in context-dependence.

In both cases, the iconic sign can be seen to facilitate the signification. For example, even if knowledge is presented in the enactive mode (indexically), this is not possible without the prior presentation of a model for action. Equally, this function of the iconic sign can be seen, when pictures and other iconic devices are used to facilitate the understanding of more abstract content represented in the symbolic mode. Thus the relationship of the icon to the other signs, in terms, of function may be represented in the manner below.

Figure 3. Signs and related functions

Context-Dependency   Context-Freedom
Indexical   Symbolic

Facilitating
Iconic
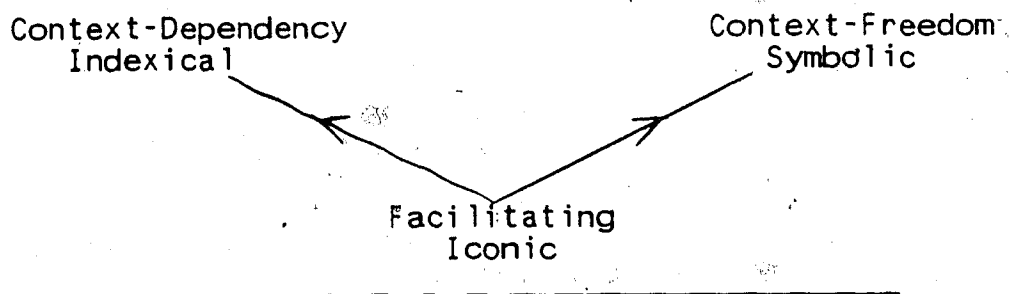
It is important to point out here that a context will be any distinguishable, situational whole in which

interaction around content takes place. Thus a context may be a lesson, a unit of work, a whole programme or the complex of the different contents which makes up the school's entire programme. Indeed, context will also extended to the wider sociocultural situation. As a consequence of this conceptualisation, a prime point of focus will be on the the way the different subcategories relate semiotically to the larger subsuming contexts.

In all of this, it must be borne in mind that the categories referring to signs are not to be seen as hard and fast categories but as signifying orientations which may contain elements from any other. The point is that an orientation represents a form of signification in which one of the categories seems to predominate. With this strategy of seeing signs in terms of their underlying functional possibilities, inquiry into the curriculum domain will become more useful in that signifying activities can be described and also explained in terms of the motives underlying the use of signs and the possible consequences as the subject responds to what is signified.

But signs must also be seen within the framework of a dynamic process because without a process signs cannot speak. Thus questions like the following will have to be addressed: How do signs metamorphose? What is the

process behind a particular sign sequence? How is the movement from context-dependency to context-freedom expressed? These questions will have to be answered if semiotic inquiry is to escape the fixity of synchrony and ossification which Wexler (op. cit) is so concerned about.

Barthes' notion of denotation/connotation can be usefully appplied in this regard because, if nothing else, these concepts indicate movement in the signifying process in a specific way. For example, it can answer questions about how certain subject matters change contents but still retain nomenclature. Or on another level, it can show how Ausubel s notion of the advanced organiser spreads out into a connotative system. But Peirce's notion of the mutual definition of the sign can also provide the description of how the process is carried through. Given these strategic considerations about signs and their semiotic function, a frame for interpretation will now be approached in order to see how meaning can be uncovered.

Frame for Interpretation

The interpretive strategy will be to attempt to operationalise the Peircean notion of interpretation as was discussed previously. The scheme appears below and

includes   the   domain   and   action   involved   in
.interpretation.

Table 8. Interpretive Scheme

Firstness	Secondness	Thirdness
Ground	Object	Interpretant
Arena	Text	Discourse
Explanation ·	Understanding	Interpretation

------------------------------>

The   scheme above is generic in the sense that   it   does
not   reveal the kinds of specific problems to   be   dealt
with   in its application to curriculum inquiry. Some   of
these can be addressed by referring to the three   levels
of   meanings   (which is already part of the   process   of
interpretation   since the decision has been made   to   do
the partitioning).

At   the first level of meanings,   intrepretation will
be   seen in terms of the patterns ·perceived   within   and
between   the   categories that make   up   the   interactive
categories of the outline for groundings. This whole
interactional field will be perceived as at the level of
signification where the inquirer interprets the text   as
understood   without reference to the subjects/actors   in
the situation at the other two levels.

As an illustration, consider a particular topic   in
a science programme. A preliminary analysis can be   made

of content of the topic not only at the level of the signifieds but also of the signifiers - in the Barthesian sense. The following questions may then be asked about the patterning: Are the arguments predominantly indexical by the absence of generalisations or references to the wider human experience? Is the topic couched in an individualised mode, thereby becoming indexical in that it removes the possibility of reflec ve action on the part of the teacher(Apple 1982; previously ███████ed)?

These are only some of the ████ions which may be asked this level of interpretation. What is important is that the search for patterns is already pre-structured by notions about the signs and even deeper semantic notions such as context-dependency. If we return again to see the act of interpretation in terms of the sign relations, this is easily understood as a necessary part of the encounter with the text. This pre-structuring is, in fact, the ground which makes the encounter possible.

Interpretation at the second level of meanings will be somewhat different since the inquirer will be focus ing what the representation of the content means to the subject as s/he encounters it at two points: both outside and inside the teaching/learning context.

In the first situation, the inquirer will elicit from the subjects/actors, their perceptions about the content through interviews or other self-reporting devices. The responses will then be combined with the result of inquiry at the first level of meanings to structure the observation at the second point of this level of meanings. At this point the inquirer will focus on the interaction between the teachers and students in the instructional situation. All of this interaction will be observed in an "objectivist" mode as the inquirer interprets without referring directly to the actors in the situation for explanations or clarification on their behaviour.

As an example, the teacher may be observed while teaching with the package, in order to see what kind of signifying representation is employed and if they are consistent with the previous accounts of both the inquirer and the teacher in respect of the package. Such an example clearly indicates that there is, for interpretational purposes, a significant intertwine between the two points at this level of meanings since the actors have significant encounters with the prior to the instructional situation. This has to be so since the content is a social product which is clearly as having a specific function in the society. Further,

since it has been selected to be part of the school curriculum, all those concerned with it will necessarily have some perceptions of it before the encounter at the level of instruction.

Moreover, this fact underlines the importance of Wexler's suggestion that content should be followed through all its stages of transformation in the society. This transformation, clearly takes place when prior perceptions about the content comes up against its representation in the classroom situation. One clear, illustration of this can be seen in the attrition rate for certain content areas of the school curriculum.

At the next level of interpratation, the inquirer tries to improve the adequacy of the interpretation by trying to sort the many observations made at the level of encounter. This is done through dialogue with the actors in the interactional situation. The inquirer tries to get the actors to reflect on their experience in order to clarify or explain those signifying actions which are held to be important for understanding the interaction. For example, the inquirer may observe acts which he considers to be transgressions from the expected behaviour and he asks the students or teacher for clarification.

For interpretation to be adequate, this

.reflectivity on the part of the subjects/actors must be encouraged because it is necessary for the inquirer's own reflectivity as s/he completes a circle of interpretation by turning the process around through the second level of meanings to the level of signification.

In sum, the interpretation will, in the final analysis, be a representation of the interplay between three levels of meanings in the curriculum domain. This interplay is, in fact, a complex of mediations which constitute both the categories of interactions and the interactions themselves. The inquirer s interpretive discourse will be about signs and this will reveal the depth semantics which is the ultimate aim of semiotic inquiry. In all of this, it must be noted that interpretation is, in itself a semiotic act and in such a way, the inquirer must be aware that his/her activities passes through the same stages as those who are being observed in the interactional situation.

The strategy regarding the various aspects of semiotic inquiry into the curriculum, have been merely suggestions for a way into the undertaking. It is not intended to be a theoretical stance which will be followed by the statement of hypotheses to be tested in inquiry. This could not be the approach to curriculum inquiry at this point since the state of knowledge about

the domain can hardly be said to be on firm ground.
However, the exploration of the semiotic ideas of the
three semioticians discussed has been fruitful enough to
suggest that some understanding about the domain can
result if the ideas are approached as a dialectic
between theory and practice. The final task of this study
will be to attempt a practical illustration of the
semiotic approach that has been developed using a
content area of the curriculum at the secondary level of
education.

Semiotics and Curriculum Inquiry : Tactic

The illustration will, for the most part, follow
the outline of the strategy dealt with in the previous
section but reference will also be made other issues
raised earlier in the chapter. The discussion will
proceed in three sections according to levels of
inquiry. The content area chosen for the illustration
is Home Economics and although the situation alluded to
will be hypothetical, my knowledge about this content
will also intrude.

First Level of Inquiry

The inquiry will begin at the level of intended
meanings which is the semiotic stage of signification.
The first step will be an analysis of the immanent

nature of the content as it is organised for transmission in thé educational situation. This content will be taken from the textbooks and other prepared materials and the first phase of analysis will be carried out using the ideas of Hirst in order to see how it is constituted.

Home Economics is a content area that is a complex composed of subareas of content. These are: Foods and Nutrition; Clothing and Textiles; and Home Management. These three are done separately and not integrated as the title suggests. In looking at all of these subareas Home Economics (hereafter Home Ec.) may be classified as a field of knowledge according to the Hirstian scheme. This is so on two levels: firstly, because three areas have come together to form one administrative area in the curriculum; and secondly, each area is clearly composed of elements from the traditional discplines, e.g. aesthetics, social sciences and the physical sciences, in the case of Foods and Nutrition.

Once this is done, a semiotic analysis of the way the content is organised can be done. For example, are the arguments which deal with the scientific aspect of the content different from those which deal with the aesthetic aspects? The focus here will be on the Hirstian notion each traditional disciple has its own

peculiar syntax and consequently, it can be assumed that these syntaxes will be represented in different ways. But behind this representation, will be the way the reality in question is to be organised relative to the individual who tries to learn or use it. Hence the importance of trying to find out the signifying orientations of the different aspects of the content.

One way of approaching the orientation of the content, will be to focus on how generalisations are presented. The usual categories of the inductive and deductive approach can be seen as indexical and symbolic orientations, respectively. Also, the use of metaphors, models, diagrams, illustrations and other such iconic devices will provide useful clues as to how each aspect of the content is organised.

Once the immanent nature of the content has been dealt with, the next step at this level of signification is to determine the nature of the social construction that has been put upon it. This exercise follows logically from the premise that the curriculum domain is essentially social and as such content will be organised to reflect the characteristics of the society.

Consequently, the focus will be on the way that messages about the values and other charateristics of the society is represented through the significative

organisation of the content of Home Ec. This kind of
analysis may be approached through the ideas of 'Young
and Bernstein on the social evaluation of curriculum
knowledge as it is expressed in the textbooks and other
subject matter materials.

Moving from the basic idea that a content area may
be classified as high- or low-status, the following
questions, among many others may be posed about the
content:

1. Is it related to the everyday life of those for whom
it is intended?

2. Is the content presented predominantly in a written
mode? Or, is the written presentation supplemented by
pictorial and other forms of graphic representations?

3. Do the activities in the textbook imply groupwork or
    individual work?

These questions are derived from Young descriptions
about the nature of high-status knowledge as it is
expressed in the content of the curriculum. They are
being asked primarily to assign Home Ec. to a
provisional status as a reflection of its evaluation
within the society. But many more questions may be asked
about content as it relates to the other categories in
the interactional field of the curriculum domain. For
example, does the content suggest a high degree of

control by the teacher in this transmission? Or, does it seem to alienate the teacher as Apple (1982) has suggested in his discussion on the effect of certain pre-packaged materials?

The analysis may also be enhanced by the application of the Barthesian model of structural analysis for such social systems as food, clothes and furniture. This seems to be particularly easy with Home Ec. for two main reasons . Firstly, much of its content deals with the same conventional systems that Barthes has addressed and in such a way, it is possible to analyse the expression of the relevant information in the textbook in order to see the extent of the arbitrary relationship between content and expression.

Secondly, Home Ec. is largely a practical area of study where the emphasis is on procedures. Therefore, analysis can be done to see how these procedures are routinised. For example, the students can master certain skills either by reflection or rote and these two can be related to context-dependency (rote) or context-freedom (reflection) through the signifying orientations of the index or the symbol.

The whole purpose of this social analysis of the content is to uncover a correspondence between its social evaluation and the depth semantic involved in the,

location of the individual relative to his/her context. Again, this will be done through the search for the signifying orientations of the expression of the content.

But the proper analysis of the social evaluation of the content will have to go beyond the examination of the textbook and other materials since there are other ways in which this evaluation is expressed. One important source in this regard is the official statement about the value of the subject to the student and the society. This may be found in Government documents and those of the professional associations for the content area. Additionally, certain administrative strategies relative to the particular content area may be considered. For example, time-tabling arrangements for Home Ec. should reveal information about its valuation within the school in terms of the how its allocated time is spread out over the week. For example, if Home Ec. is time-tabled for the last period on Friday afternoons, it may be a strong signifier of this evaluation.

It would seem at this point that the semiotic analyses and interpretations to be carried out at this level are quite straightforward. This is due to the

clear line that has been suggested between social evaluations, contextual relationships and the corresponding signifying orientations. However, it must be pointed out that this is a rather simplified model which can be transformed into something far more semiotically complex when it is considered that content and expression can each have quite independent semiotic constitutions.

It is quite possible for a section of the content of Home Economics to be organised indexically while the dominant mode of expression is symbolic. This will most likely happen when there is a shift in the organisation of the reality that it is supposed to represent. For example, if the developers of the curriculum attempt to upgrade the scientific status of the content area, it is likely that a shift will take place at the level of expression (in terms of how the ideas are expressed) with a corresponding change at the level of substance. This kind of 'resemioticisation' can also take place at the level of substance and the inquirer should be aware of this expression of dynamism since the content of a subject like Home Ec. is likely to continue to seek an upgrading of the low status that it seems to have in the society.

Barthes' work provides some very useful tools for this kind of analysis. Firstly, he insists on the the semiotic independence of the levels of content and expression. He also posits the notions of denotation and connotation as the basis of the mythical sign. Both these ideas can be useful not only at this level of analysis and interpretation but also at the levels of encountered and emergent meanings. The reason for this is that at each of these levels, the interaction creates the dynamism which causes uneven changes in the semiotic activities.

Second Level of Inquiry

All of the analyses at this level of signification attempt to establish a ground for the second level of analysis where encountered meanings make up the text. They provide the inquirer with a frame for his/her observations as the actors interact with the content. As was said before this level of meanings correspond to the object in the sign relation and as such is derived from the category of secondness where perceptions enter the consciousness in a brute way to be analysed at the next level, that of thirdness. For the purpose of this study this level of meanings has been placed at two points - prior to the instructional situation and during it.

Prior to the observations at the level of

instruction, the inquirer will attempt to find out what the content area means to all of the actors within the curriculum domain, in terms of its social significance. In such a way, students, teachers, administrators and other relevant persons will be the focus of the inquiry at this point. This can be done through interviews and other self-report devices constructed around the perceptions gained from the inquiry at the level of intended meanings. This will therefore be done on the basis of the ideas of Young and Bernstein about the social nature of content.

But the content itself will not be the only point of focus since all the other categories in the interactional situation will have to be considered. For example, what do the students think of the Home Economics teacher as a social being? Does the teacher appear to have high social status because s/he is an Home Economics teacher? Or, alternatively how does the teacher think of the students in terms of intelligence, social background and in relation to success at learning the subject? These are some of the questions that must be asked in order to interpret the interaction at the level of instruction.

It is at the level of instruction that the inquiry becomes more complex, simply because the inquirer is·

dealing with a very dynamic interactional situation in which a great number of variables may be taken into account. Indeed, the classroom is a veritable semiotic entity constituted by a multiplicity of interactions at many levels. At least, at the level of possibility, every thing can mean something to the actors within this situation.

However, the situation becomes more manageable if the focus of observation is placed on content as the generator of the interactions. Thus, observation will be made of all of those interactions which seem to result from conveyance of message about the content, since all the other significant classroom variables such as space and time will have been already dealt with at the level of intended meanings.

With this basic point of focus, the inquirer, will be able to use a number of frames in order to understand how the teacher and the students interact with each other as the former tries to teach Home Ec. and the later try to learn it. Below are some of the questions which the inquirer might address during the observation.

1. Does the teacher seem to use any one of the signifying orientations more than the other two as messages about the content are conveyed?

2. How do the students seem to respond to each of the

signifying orientations?

3. Does the teacher use different signifying orientations for different aspects of the content?

4. Do the students seem to have more control over the pacing and organisation of the lesson?

5. Does the teacher seem to be of the transmission or interpretation type? How is this expressed?

6. Does the teacher use the strategies of denotation and connotation in delivering the content?

7. Does the ontology of the messages follow those of the Peircean sign relations of ground, object and interpretant?

These are just a few of the questions that the inquirer may have at the back of his/her mind as he tries to understand the interactional situation semiotically. Many others from the level of intended meanings may also be pertinent here.

It may be said that the questions focus on the teacher but it must be understood that the teacher signifying activities cannot be properly understood outside of the response of the students at whom they are primarily directed. The responses of the students are necessarily implied in the statements about the teacher's activities. It will also be noticed that all of the questions are derived from all the discussions

up to this point and that the works of the three
semioticians have formed the basis of the inquiry. This
is testimony to the usefulness of their ideas which
will also be used at the final level of interpretation.

Third Level of Inquiry

If the Peircean frame of interpretation is followed
we can say that ground has now united with the object
insofar as the inquirer has carried out analysis and
interpretation at the levels of intended and encountered
meanings. The final task will be to complete the
hermeneutic circle by taking the undertaking at the
level of thirdness where reflectivity will impose order
on the numerous observations made at the two previous
levels. The major task will be to work out the kind of
correlations which have emerged by the unity of the
ground and the object.

An important part of this reflective stage will be
to find out from the actors themselves what the
encounter meant to them. Of course, it will not be
possible to ask about the totality of the interactions
and as such, only significant and problematic areas will
be considered. For example, the teacher might have
suggested at the first point of the encounter that the
students should be encouraged to think for themselves

while she seems to be intent on transmission during instruction. A clarification by the teacher can remove the interpretational problem which results from the two opposing position.

The difficulty at this point resides in the possibility that the individual will not be able to explain the rules which underlie his/her signifying activities even though they might have been carried out consciously (Terhart, 1985). However, such a possibility does not vitiate the dialogic principle at this level of interpretation, since the account of signifying practices cannot be adequate without the meanings the subject derives from his/her experiences. The soundness of this principle lies in the presumption that the subject has greater access to the mental events which correlate with the signs s/he produces.

This difficulty can be partly eased by referring the subject back to the two previous levels of meanings in order that some prompt or support for the required explanations may be found. The semiotic nature of this strategy is obvious since the individual is taken back to the two basic levels of the sign relations in order to create the order that is thirdness. It is at this final stage it may be said that the circle of

interpretation is complete. It is at this stage the inquirer holds up the interpretation of the interactions in the curriculum domain for scrutiny by members of the community.

Once there is the intention to present this interpretation to the community, the question of the way observations are made and represented must be addressed. This is perhaps one of the most serious problems to be dealt with in the conduct of inquiry. This is largely so because it relates to the question of validity and adequacy of the meaning statements which purports to represent the world as it really is. As a result, much of the discussions and debates about the results of inquiry are given over to the reliability of the methods use to register observations.

Qualitative and Quantitative Methodology

Much of the concern revolves around the tension between the objectivist and subjectivist approaches to inquiry. As was seen in Chapter 4, the former tends to rely on quantitative methods of recording observations while the latter relies on a more discursive form of representation.

It has already been indicated that the semiotic paradigm renders the distinction between the two

positions irrelevant by its focus on the mediation between the subject and object. This principle can be easily extended to the two methods in the following way: both approaches will not be seen as opposite but alternative (sometimes complementary) ways of expressing meanings. Thus, it will be possible that both methods can find accomodation in the interpretation of a single text.

As an illustration, consider the inquiry tactic outlined above. It will be quite appropriate to use a Likert-type questionnaire to find out what the subject means to the actors. The justification for this lies in the fact that the respondents interact with the questionnaire although not in the same way as the oral interview. But once there is response there is meaning expressed and as such information can be very valuable. To take this further, the statistical analysis applied to the questionnaire can be approached semiotically. A factor analysis of the responses can reveal semantic subfields which constitute the overall response to the questionnaire. These subfields will then be discussed in terms of their signifying orientations.

Once this is done it becomes possible to compare or correlate the results with anecdotes or other forms of discursive representation since they too will have to be

discussed in terms of their signifying orientations. Thus, the semiotic approach generates a way of speaking about reality which necessarily transcends and accomodates both methods. One might even say that the semiotic discourse is a metalanguage into which other ways of speaking about the world may be translated.

Prolegomenon

It must be pointed out here that the tactic outlined above is but an illustration of how the semiotic approach may be applied. In fact, because it has been so wide-ranging, it merely skims the surface of the well of possibilities offered by the semiotic theories discussed. Indeed, it is quite possible for any of the three levels of inquiry to be a study in itself. But the aim of this present thesis is merely to open a new direction into the understanding of the curriculum domain.

At first blush, it would seem that the aim has been achieved since the explorations into the social ramifications of the content of education and the semiotic field has produced an approach to inquiry that is pregnant with possibilities at every level - from an object domain through paradigmatic considerations to the devices and tactics for this inquiry. It can be

maintained that this has been possible through the exploration of the ideas of Peirce, Saussure and Barthes.

It is hoped that this outline will provide the framework for seeing the curriculum in a new way; a way that is oriented by a conceptualisation of the curriculum field as an interactional domain in which messages from and about the content of education are exchanged by the actors in the domain.

It is clear the this effort has merely skimmed the surface of a vast untapped well of possibilities in this interactional field. But the claim can be made that the basic approach which has been articulated will generate meaningful inquiry in many diverse directions which may be ultimately unified under the general motif of mediation. This, in fact, is the only way that human behaviour can be approached since without it the individual can interact neither with self nor the object world.

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