Folklore Semiotic: Charles Peirce and the Experience of Signs

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As you well know, I am not a student of Peirce. I am a thief of Peirce.
I take from him what I want and let the rest go, most of it.
                    Novelist Walker Percy, in *Thief of Peirce*

It has never been in my power to study anything—mathematics, ethics,
metaphysics, gravitation, thermodynamics, optics, chemistry,
comparative anatomy, astronomy, psychology, phonetics, economics,
the history of science, whist, men and women, wine, meteorology,
except as a study of semiotic...How...rarely I have met any who cares
to understand my studies, I need not tell you...
                    Charles Sanders Peirce, in a letter to Lady Welby

The list of subjects which turn-of-the-century American scientist and philosopher Charles S. Peirce enumerated in a letter to the Lady Welby seems almost satirical in scope, yet the founder of semiotic[1] and pragmatism actually confronted such a range of topics in his turbulent writing career. According to scholars and proponents of Peirce's philosophy, this was not merely the conceit of a modern dilettante. Rather, Peirce constructed a theoretical artifice so soaring that it encompassed all of his many areas of interest (and potentially everything else) in a grand, cosmological theory of signs. This paper cannot serve as an adequate review of Peirce's or the Peirceans' work. Nor am I in a position to offer a developed polemic for or against Peirce's inclusion on seminar reading lists and dissertation bibliographies. In synopsizing a fragment of Peirce's semiotic and discussing recent examples of Peirce being referenced in cultural research, the best I can hope for is to point interested readers in the right direction to learn more—thus, this paper should be read as an indexical sign. In this capacity, it also shares (iconically) characteristics with a trailer for a newly-released film: presenting in a very brief space some highlights of the Peircean show, relying heavily on blurbs from the critics, and hopefully giving the overall impression that the real thing is worth the price of admission.[2]

Although the field of semiotics shares much history with the discipline of folklore, the particular importance of Peirce's role on this shared stage has vacillated. Below, I offer a preview of some basics of Peircean semiotic, give a cursory glance to certain recent scholars of expressive culture who have found Peirce useful, and suggest some ways folklorists might benefit, like novelist Walker Percy, by stealing a bit from Peirce's rich storehouse of ideas.[3]

Two Times Three

First to give some idea of the theory at stake: "semeiotic" was Peirce's word for the elaborate, almost all-encompassing model of signification that he constructed. Now widely referred to as "semiotic," Peirce's system was a forerunner to what is commonly called "semiotics," or the study of signs (linguistic or otherwise), and the processes through which they acquire meaning and are used in practice. Although Peirce wrote in the late nineteenth century and influenced many of the towering figures in more contemporary semiotics (such as Thomas Sebeok, Umberto Eco, and Roman Jakobson) and other fields (e.g., Jacques Derrida), his renown pales in comparison with his Swiss contemporary, Ferdinand de Saussure. Peirceans insist that their muse nonetheless provides a sign theory which is far more useful than Saussure's. I will leave it to semioticians to slug this one out, but would like to suggest what at least some of the differences might be.

Saussure's well-known notion of the sign, elaborated in his *Course in General Linguistics* (1966) consists of two parts: an expression, sound, or other perceivable figure, the "signifier"; and a concept or meaning to which it refers, the "signified." A classic example would be the word "tree" as the signifier and the idea of an actual tree as the signified. Saussure suggested that this relationship is *arbitrary,* and thus that there is no natural connection between the linguistic signs we use and the things they stand for; but that the relationship is also *structured,* and thus is not really "arbitrary" for all individuals at all times. Rather, changes in the meanings of signs happen only gradually, over long periods of time, and not at the whim of individuals. Saussure also delineated the systemic, structural aspects of language, or *langue,* as opposed to "language in use," or specific utterances in real practice—what he called *parole.* While recognizing that both aspects affect language, Saussure's work and the structural linguistics that built on it overwhelmingly emphasized *langue,* the systemic side of things.

Structuralists who drew from Saussure's work loved (and still love) a good duality—the project of structural analysis is often to locate "binary oppositions" in order to reveal the shape of the structuring system that determines

signs and their use. Three is a more important number to Peirce. Saussure's notion of the sign as a dyad—a signifier and signified—is replaced in Peirce's model of the sign by a *triad,* a three-way relationship between a "representamen," its "object," and an "interpretant."[4] The parts of this triadic relationship roughly correspond to another three-part philosophical model: Peirce's ontological modes or categories of Firstness, Secondness, and Thirdness. To try to explicate these two threes concisely, I will begin with the modes.

Imagine you are sitting in a room without exterior windows, but with electric lights. The light in the room has a certain quality which you neither notice nor reflect upon. Consider the light as a sign referring only to itself, to a basic and irreducible "light-ness"—this approximates what Peirce calls Firstness. Now, imagine that someone suddenly turns off the lights. For an instant, you experience the collision of two qualities: lightness and darkness. In that instant, again before you have time to reflect or think, the experience of two bounded qualities in a relationship of polarity might be considered Secondness. After the initial shock or flash of Secondness, however, almost at once, you apply the relation to memories of prior experiences, to what you know about light, darkness, their relationship, the room you're in, etc. Thoughts race into your mind: Someone has turned off the lights. The power is out. Who is near the light switch? Is there a storm? Each of these thoughts interpret lightness and darkness in the framework of general knowledge and past experience about lights, electricity, and windowless rooms, and the relationship between lightness and darkness sprouts into multiple signs of possible meanings. You experience something that gives you the impression or the effect that a relationship between the representamen of sudden darkness and the possibility of a sudden loss of power (in this example, the object) is genuine. That is, you perceive a connection based on your experience with comparable prior situations at the disposal of your memory. This is what Peirce calls Thirdness.[5]

It must be stressed that this example is analogical—in fact, we do not experience Firstness, Secondness, and Thirdness separately. Actually, these three categories refer to modes of being or kinds of phenomena that combine in various proportions to make signs. The three modes always exist in relationship with one another. Some other analogies include:

- Firstness, Secondness, Thirdness;
- quality, reaction, symbol;
- feelings, reaction-sensations, thought;
- beginning, end, process;
- monads, dyadic relations, triadic relations

(Sheriff 1994:2, 14)

In semiotic these categories describe various degrees of separation from an intrinsic quality. The three ontological modes correspond only roughly to the three parts of a sign because it is not accurate to assign each part of the sign to a mode: the representamen being Firstness, the object Secondness, etc. Rather, the ontological modes refer to stages in a process of signification—a process of acquiring *significance*— during which one, two, or three elements of a complete sign are related. When the third element joins the relation, semiosis has taken place, and the three-way relationship becomes an irreducible triadic sign. Without any one of the three components, this relationship is not really a sign.

Peirce defined a sign as "anything which determines something else (its *interpretant*) to refer to an object to which itself refers (its *object*) in the same way, this interpretant becoming in turn a sign, and so on *ad infinitum*" (*CP* 2.303, cited in Barnouw 1986:78).[6] This is a bit confusing, for in this usage, "sign" refers first to the representamen, only one part of the whole triadic sign. A representamen is a thing: a phoneme, a word, a color, a song, an epic, a pair of boots. This thing is "read" as referring to something else, the sign's object, in a condition of Secondness that calls to mind the signifier-signified relationship of Saussure—in language, for example, a word signifies a concept. An epic may signify a national identity; an object may signify its everyday function or a relationship, as in a wedding ring. But to Peirce, such a relationship between two components is still without *meaning;* it does not constitute a complete sign. Whereas Saussure argues that the binary sign relationship is arbitrary but structured or given in a symbolic/linguistic system, Peirce maintains that this relationship must be interpreted as *genuine,* that is, convincing to an interpreter. When this happens, the relationship between the representamen and object creates an "interpretant," or an idea in the mind of an interpreter that the relationship makes sense. One way to think of the interpretant is as a flash of recognition like Helen Keller's that the verbal-phonological sign "water" corresponds to the odorless fluid; another is to think of it as a "meaning-effect" (see Turino 1999:224).

So far we have:

1. R

`A "sign" or "representamen" (R) signifying only itself. We can only know the pure Firstness of an isolated representamen hypothetically, as a possibility, but not as an experience distilled from Secondness or Thirdness (Sheriff 1993:157).

2. R ————— O

A relationship between the representamen (R) and an object (O). This relationship, out of all possible relationships, is a significant one only if it is

recognized as genuine, having a meaning effect (the interpretant, I) in the mind of an interpreter:

3. R ⟍ ⟋ O
        │
        I
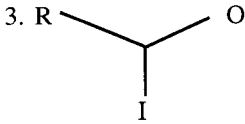
But this is only the beginning of signification. The interpretant now has a relationship (it has Secondness) *with the relationship* between the first representamen and object. This in turn must be evaluated as genuine, creating a new interpretant:

I ⎯⟨ R
       O

and again...

I ⟍ O
I1 ⎯⟋ R

I1   I2
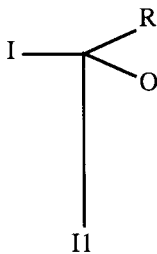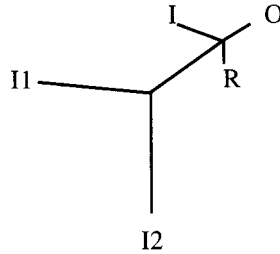
Thus I becomes a representamen (R1) relating to R—O as its object (O1), and I1 likewise relates to the initial triad as R2—O2, creating I2. Each element in the original triad thus eventually has qualities of each mode: Firstness, Secondness, and Thirdness. Each plays different roles in a series of nesting signs—in Peirce's words, "and so on, endlessly" (*CP* 2.274; see Sheriff 1989:59–61).[7]

Thus for Peirce, a meaningful sign must always involve interpretation and is always part of a process. Although it is presented here in a linear, abbreviated fashion, the ongoing process of semiosis happens in multiple directions and dimensions, clumping signs together in a "snowball effect" (cf. Turino 1999:235) and resulting not so much in a linear chain of meaning, but in a sort of semiotic web of related signs, a layering of interpretants. A verse of a song, then, might create such interpretants as memories of other songs, a human relationship ("our song"), or a prior period in the listener's life; the interpretant may also consist of unspeakable, corporeal reactions such as goosebumps (Turino 1999). While we can still speak of a word or a verse as a "sign," then, it also must be understood as many related signs, creating different interpretants or meaning effects.

Although no sign is without Thirdness altogether, signs can variously privilege Firstness, Secondness, and Thirdness either in their form (within the triad, the relationships can be closer—with more Firstness—or more Thirdly/ mediated) or the way they are experienced by the interpreter as having various proximities to a hypothetical, imaginary, intrinsic quality of Firstness. Peirce had names for these various kinds of Firstness, Secondness, and Thirdness, thus:

> A sign or representamen is one of three kinds (Qualisign, Sinsign, or Legisign); it relates to its object in one of three ways (as Icon, Index, or Symbol); and it has an interpretant that *represents* the sign as a sign of possibility, fact, or reason, i.e. as Rheme, Dicent Sign, or Argument. These three sets of three terms are the 'trichotomies' in Peirce's semiotic. (Sheriff 1994:40)

A qualisign is the sign-type closest to hypothetical Firstness on all axes. An icon is a sign with the closest relationship of similarity with its object, a sign of "firstish-secondness." Likewise, each component in each trichotomy combines Firstness, Secondness, and Thirdness of form and quality in a particular, characteristic way. Peirce combined these three kinds of threes to identify ten classes of signs, so that a particular sign may be identified, for example, as a sinsign that functions as an iconic rheme.[8]

All this makes for a theory of signs that goes far beyond Saussure's familiar signifier-signified dyad, which is more widely taught as the basis for a discussion of semiotics. Although numerous semioticians have tried to synthesize the best of Peirce and Saussure (see Hanks 1996), some Peirceans insist that semiotic is a complete alternative to Saussure's semiology, with the crucial difference being triadicity. Briefly put, an important distinction lies in Peirce's pragmatic focus on *effect* or *interpretation* as the locus of meaning, rather than a signing system (a structure) itself. Interpretation considered as an inevitable part of the sign (Singer 1984[1978]) allows for individual variation from "structural" patterns (Choby 1998:29). In contrast with Saussure's preoccupation with linguistic signs, the Peircean semiotic also goes beyond language to consider all types of signs.[9]

A Folklore Semiotic

Thomas Sebeok, eminent American semiotician and a folklorist, notes that "folklore. . . is, and has been for some time, richly permeated with semiotic ideas and practices. . ." (1991:51). Richard Bauman, who in addition to his role as an innovator in folklore has also served as president of the Semiotic Society of America, charted in his presidential address how four key modern

semioticians—Vladimir Propp, Petr Bogatyrev, Jakobson, and Mikhail Bakhtin—
were also principally concerned with folklore (1982). Like semiotics in general,
however, semiotics used in the study of folklore has often followed the path
derived from Saussure, with exceptions (see McDowell 1986; Bauman 1982).
When Peirce is cited for his sign theory in folkloristic or anthropological
discussion, often only the second-trichotomy signs (index, icon, and symbol)
come up. Even more often, however, Peirce inconspicuously takes a place
alongside other theorists of signs in a scholar's theoretical toolkit—thus, most
writers who use semiotic "steal" from Peirce, stopping short of a dedicated,
professed Peirceanism. Thus it seems that Peirce's major channel of influence is
an indirect one: Peirce filtered through other authors.[10] An intriguingly diverse
range of thinkers cite the influence of Peirce, including deconstructionist Derrida
(Barnouw 1989), structural linguist Jakobson (Fisch 1986[1983]:430), Singer
(1984[1978]), and semiotician Eco (Sebeok 1991:76–79; Innis 1985), and
Peircean concepts continue to inform others' work through these authors.

        Yet other scholars are enthusiastic about it enough to highlight Peircean
semiotic in their work. An influential channel for distinctly Peircean ideas
in anthropology opened with anthropologist Singer's essay "For a Semiotic
Anthropology" (1984 [1978]). Singer inspired specifically Peircean semiotic
inquiry—particularly with regard to the social conception of the self—which
precipitated in an edited volume in Singer's honor (Lee and Urban 1989). In
their introduction, Benjamin Lee and Greg Urban look to Peirce's processual,
constitutive semiotic to emphasize that the self is constructed semiotically
(1989:2). Like much performance-oriented folklore research, which owes a
great deal to linguistic anthropology (see Kapchan 1998; Bauman 1982, 1989;
Abrahams and Bauman 1981), 1980s Peircean works like Lee and Urban's
edition were primarily concerned with questions of language—whether with
the first-person "I" as a constituent of a cultural sense of self (Lee 1989), or
with the shortcomings of language to express the experience of suicide
(Daniel 1989). Several recent efforts to theorize nonlinguistic signification
have turned to Peirce directly for a model.

The Untalkables

        In recent years, folklorists and anthropologists have turned to the body
as a site of meaning, expression, or even of forms of cognition or "thought"
in their research on "bodylore" (Young 1995[1993]), "somatic modes of
attention" (Csordas 1993), "the senses in anthropology" (Stoller 1989),
"embodiment" (Csordas 1994), and extra-linguistic, bodily experiences of
meaning like "image schemata" (Johnson 1987). Peircean theory's utility

for addressing nonlinguistic signs, especially in the corners of his matrix of signs devoted to less-systemic, "non-semantico-referential" signs (Turino 1999:250n2), makes the theory well-suited for such inquiry. This "body" of work is concerned with unraveling problems of subject and object that emerge in applications of Cartesian notions of a distinct mind and body. While Peirce asserts that there can be no human "thought" or "reason" without Thirdness, he does not equate Thirdness solely with cognitive thought, language, or culture—rather, he considers Thirdness the domain of "habit" (Sheriff 1993), which, like later formulations of "habitus" (Bourdieu 1977) suggests a way around Descartes's legacy of a model of body and mind as separate by locating knowledge and meaning in embodied practice (Turino 1999).

In work relevant to the folkloric interest in "bodylore," E. Valentine Daniel uses Peirce's modes to discuss traumatic experiences of an "aloneness disorder" and violence in Sri Lanka (1989, 1996). Drawing on Daniel's work in her Master's thesis, medical anthropologist Alexandra Choby discusses the experience of "embodied memory" as a profoundly visceral semiosis that can bring back much of the trauma of a prior violent experience in its recall (1998:5). Using a tendency toward Firstness to identify the intensity of the meaning-effect of traumatic memory (p. 52), Choby charges that prior anthropological formulations of embodiment, such as Nancy Scheper-Hughes's and Margaret Lock's (1986) "The Mindful Body" are dependent on a dyadic model of the sign, which does not adequately link individual variation and cultural pattern; or phenomenology and structure (1998:51).

Like Daniel and Choby, ethnomusicologist Thomas Turino is concerned with less-mediated forms of semiosis, experiences which strike the interpreter with a corporeal, nonlinguistic intensity, but Turino focuses on the power of music as a signing system to affect feelings (interpretants) of belonging, identity, or again, memory, examining the meaning-effects which pose problems for any analogical treatment of music as a kind of language or discourse—what Charles Seeger has termed the "linguocentric predicament" of musicology (cited in Turino 1999:251n10).[11] To Turino, this is the emotionally powerful dimension of music which makes it well-suited to identity practices: "Music involves signs *of* feeling and experience rather than the types of mediational signs that are *about* something else" (1999:224).[12]

These expressly Peircean works are concerned with experiences that are meaningful but not linguistic, and which apply to areas of expressive culture, bodylore, and identity. Reading such work also raises some of the problems that come with applications of semiotic, however. One of these lies in using a scientific, logical system to describe processes of signification which increasingly are being theorized as shifting and fluid. While Peirce's vocabulary of neologisms

and specific definitions of sign terms enables discussion of the many different sign types, it can also lend itself to reduction. For example, to abbreviate Thirdness as "culture" oversimplifies both the terminology being used and the process being described.[13] The refixing of culture that Peirce's Thirdness may seem to invite needs not only to be tempered by a nuanced concept of Thirdness but also must respond to critiques of the culture concept itself (e.g. Abu-Lughod 1991; Rosaldo 1993[1989]; Gupta and Ferguson 1992).

Another potential problem revolves around the notion of "genuine" as a requisite quality for a sign. The universal scope of Peirce's semiotic, in which all are signs, underlies a semiosic cosmogony, in which Peirce imagines a "creation" or "big bang" in terms of Firstness, Secondness, and Thirdness and the ongoing evolution of semiosis which follows, creating the universe of signs in which we live. In these terms, Peirce posits "natural laws" as signs which have created such genuine and consistent interpretants as to be almost without variation (Sheriff 1994). On one hand this broad theoretical expanse can be interpreted as insisting on the "naturalness" of signs, in direct opposition to the arbitrariness which Saussure's model insists on, but which was submerged for years in the quest for structure. This idea of natural signs can make a Peircean approach a conservative one, which instills prior uses and definitions of words (signs) with transcendent value. Thus there is a teleological dynamic in Peirce's notion that "all things tend toward habit," that Thirdness is a result of a natural gravitation toward order and repetition in a universe of signs.

But the inclusiveness of semiotic theory can be spun another way if the human element of the interpretant is emphasized. Remember, meaning in the Peircean sign is a meaning-effect—thus it is contingent, historical, and dependent on the act of signification and the experience of signs. I would also suggest that this makes semiotic meaning well-suited to ethnographic inquiry. This view of Peircean semiotic has much more in common with various kinds of discourse-centered linguistic ethnography (see Sherzer 1987; Farnell and Graham 1997; Urban 1991), which has its share of Peircean influence, but which also can emphasize the particular use of signs over structure or a general, habitual system of thirds. Discourse approaches also at times draw on the Bakhtinian notion of the sign, by which account meaning occurs dialogically, in the negotiated space between a speaker and hearer—that is, between various interpretants (Bakhtin 1986)—rather than growing in a progressive march toward universal "habit." In these latter kinds of semiotics, the Peircean sign can still be enlisted to help describe and make sense of different kinds of signs (the focus on effects is particularly useful), but the historical layering of interpretants that provides the basis for Thirdness is seen as provisional, intertextual, and erratic, rather than natural and accumulative for all humankind.

Conclusion: Thieves of a Theory

These reservations offer a possible, partial answer to the question raised by compelling uses of Peirce: if the theory is so rich, why follow the novelist Percy and be only a "thief" of Peirce? Why should we all not be Peirceans? Peirce and some Peirceans can come across as suspicious to the reader who has benefited from several rounds of "postness" (postmodernism, poststructuralism, the postcultural, or postrepresentational), anthropological relativist interventions that highlight human variation rather than continuity, and critiques of the "Enlightenment" thought which Peirce in some ways took for granted. Take, for example, Peirce's hope for a "Normative Science," or the importance of words like "logic" and "Reason" in his system. These terms have enough semantic nerve endings to make a contemporary reader wince—is this another apotheosis of Western metaphysics and the "dead white male?" Moreover, in a postmodern period characterized in part by a skepticism toward universal or "totalizing" theories (Hebdige 1988), Peirce's general theory is about as "meta" as they come: a teleological, architectonic system extrapolated from his basic three modes and sign trichotomies to account for cosmology, evolution, natural law, aesthetics, and ethics all as part of a grand narrative of signs.[14]

Peirce was no doubt steeped in the modern, metaphysical tendencies of his day, but is his theory compatible with postmodernism and other contemporary developments? The answer depends in part on whether the asker views postmodernism as a continuation of the modern project or as a radical break with what came before. Whatever else it did and does, modernism split with prior thought by embracing a multiplicity of perspectives on reality, though often while maintaining the concept of a unified, universal truth underlying them all. Some commentators on postmodernity argue that postmodernism as a theoretical and aesthetic sensibility merely continues this trend to greater degrees, resulting in recognition of diverse "epistemes," knowledges," and a fragmentation or death of the subject—in short, a greater and more elaborated multiplicity (Harvey 1990). The issue of Peirce and postmodernism also invokes structuralism—in fact, it may be in part attributable to structuralism's falling out of favor that overt invocations of Peirce and semiotics seem fewer now than in the 1980s. As implied above, however, Peircean theory's relationship to structuralism, which largely derived from Saussurean linguistic theory, is ambivalent.

Peirce's semiotic is modern to an extreme degree: it offers a lens that can capture a finer-grain picture than Saussurean semiology.[15] But by accepting meaning or truth as human experiences, it differs from a radical "unmooring" of meaning that some suspect in postmodernism (Turino 1999;

Fabian 1990). Peirce's taxonomy of signs is flexible, even admittedly hypothetical, but it is still a taxonomy; though it offers more openness than some "systems," it seems to favor irreducibility and explanation (see Kondo 1990:40). Nonetheless, several Peirceans dispute the association of semiotic with modern structuralism, arguing that Peirce is an improvement even on post-structuralist "dissidents" such as Roland Barthes (Sheriff 1989; Gorlée 1992). Others turn to Peirce for a "modern, postrepresentational discourse" (Finlay 1990), a postcolonial "counter-discourse" (Adam 1989), or a more satisfying way to achieve the critical accomplishments of deconstruction (Barnouw 1986). Still others go so far as to characterize Peirce's theory itself as postmodern (Merrell 1995). What many of these readings have in common is the notion that semiotic still offers an original contribution to theory even at this historical moment, more than a century after Peirce began writing.

One reason to seek in Peirce a mediating category between the poles of reifying meaning (structuralism) and deferring it indefinitely (postmodernism) is to develop a vocabulary which may prove useful in discussing meaning as *experienced*. In particular, Peirce's work seems useful in the ethnographic endeavor in that it provides concepts of meaning in context and with reference to specific social actors: the meaning-effect is a kind of "meaning-to" someone. Further, in a pragmatic mode, Peirce presented even the most grand of his schemes as hypothetical. Understanding signification and thus interpretation to be ongoing and constant, Peirce suggested that we take his globalizing system, consider what consequences would be implied if it were true, and test and revise it like a hypothesis in the natural sciences (Sheriff 1994:2–3).[16]

This offers an answer to a defining dilemma for ethnographers of postmodernity: how can we deal with meanings and signs as both fluid or dynamic and real (Sheriff 1989:27)? If we buy the characterization of postmodernism as suggesting that nothing is real but form (Barnouw 1986), what can we say about the subjects of our writing who see meaning and even truth in forms (cf. Sheriff 1994:xiii)? On the other hand, how do we avoid presenting people as essences or "gists" (Stewart 1996) in the inherently objectifying activity of writing? Peirce suggests one path: to offer hypotheses, in full awareness of the fact that they are artificial snapshots of single nodes in a vast, constantly spinning web of meaning. This can enable ethnographers to speak specifically to varying degrees of "identity value" or other kinds of meaning-to in various expressive forms (Turino 1999). Processual meaning, identity in constitution, and unresolved tension between received structure and individual agency all can find places in this conception of semiosis.

I would conclude, then, by encouraging a greater familiarity with Peirce. Semiotic provides a clear delineation of various sign processes, and

this offers heuristic utility, even if it must be "stolen" away from more teleological aspects of Peirce's philosophy, and even if the thief finds herself in a position like that of Peirce's philosophical descendent John Dewey, who claimed to have learned most from authors with whom he ultimately disagreed (Fisch 1986[1983]:427). Let any use of Peirce, however, also be subjected to the interrogation of critics of "culture," structuralism, and essentialism. In this way we may read for the best in Peirce, and if need be, steal it from this prolific and ambitious thinker.

Notes

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1 The singular, article-free form "semiotic" as opposed to "semiotics" is usually a marker of Peirce's influence—I use it as such here. In the other corner, followers of Ferdinand de Saussure are more likely to use "semiology," as Claude Lévi-Strauss did, although Saussure himself tried out alternatives, such as "signology" (Sebeok 1991:61–62).

2 The standard primary source for Peirce's writings is the *Collected Papers* (1960; *CP* hereafter), although Peirce scholar Kenneth Ketner has dismissed this collection as "so bad and incomplete that it is downright misleading and harmful" (quoted in Samway 1995:135). By Ketner's account, Peirce was often under pressure to reduce his essays in length to please editors and complicated his language to assuage his own fears of appearing "simple" (in Samway 1995:4). For other sources, see the "Further Readings" and Ketner's own bibliography (1986).

3 I have freely departed from the folklore literature to consider uses of Peirce with regard to various aspects of folklife, memory, or expressive culture that make for ready dialogue with folklorists. For a vision of how such interdisciplinary connections might serve folklore as a discipline, see Bauman (1996).

4 John K. Sheriff argues that "Saussure's theory of language is either consistent with or has given rise to what has become the prevailing worldview of the Western world," that is, a structural binarism (1989:xv). In this light, to argue for supplanting the Saussurean dyad with Peirce's triad can be theoretically revolutionary.

5 This analogy is similar to one Peirce himself used of lights being suddenly turned on (*CP* 1.380, cited in Sheriff 1994:28). Reference to Peirce's *Collected Papers* are cited here in the conventional form for Peirce studies—the number left of the decimal gives the volume, while the second number denotes the paragraph.

6 This is one of Peirce's most concise formations of the sign. For other definitions, se Samway 1995:34, Sheriff 1994:33-34, and *CP* 2.303, 1.541, and 2.274.

7 Some Peirceans use the diagram of a triangle shown below for its utility in showing the ongoing process of semiosis. Peircean scholar Ketner argues that this misrepresents the triad as a complex of dyads, each represented by a side of the triangle (see also Daniel 1984:19)—which has undergirded some critiques of Peirce's system (e.g. Kondo 1990:40) as not really any different from the signifier–signified relationship. The triadic relationship which is "fundamental in CSP's semeitoic" to Ketner (in Samway 1995:13) is actually irreducible, and thus better represented by the "three-legged snake" with the relationship itself at the center.

$$\text{S} \xleftarrow{\qquad\overset{\textstyle\text{I}}{\triangle}\qquad} \text{O}$$
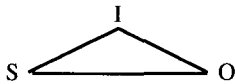
8 This vocabulary has been an obstacle to wide application of Peirce's theory, but the terms can provide a specificity that is useful in discussing form. Space prohibits their elaboration here, but the intersection of the trichotomies is best described graphically on a grid with Firstness, Secondness, and Thirdness plotted on axes of phenomenology (form) and ontology (material). See Sheriff 1989:67,74; Merrell 1995:93; and Turino 1999:233.

9 Semiotic also allows space for non-human signification, in the fields of zoosemiotics or semiosis (message making and transmission) at the cellular level (Sebeok 1991), which leads in the direction of "natural signs" theory rather than the pragmatic model of semiotic as human practice for which I am aiming here. A more sophisticated differentiation of Saussure and Peirce can be found in Sheriff (1989), Singer (1984[1978]), and Hanks (1996).

10 Ketner warns against "the received Peirce." This issue is implicit in arguing for a fair and useful "thieving" of Peirce—how much of a whole body of work can a reader afford to dismiss while still using some of its terms and models? I will again leave it to better semioticians to decide this. In a letter to Walker Percy, Ketner recommends Part Two of Eugene Rochberg-Halton's *Meaning and Modernity: Social Theory in the Pragmatic Attitude* (1986) as "a brilliant exposé of some bad

contemporary misuse of CSP among some semioticists" (in Samway 1995:20). See also Ketner's essay "Who Was Charles Sanders Peirce? And Does He Deserve Our Homage?" (Appendix II in Samway 1995:231).

11 It was perhaps a response typical of the association of "semiotics" with Saussure when I asked another ethnomusicologist whether Peirce's theory has any utility for his work, and he answered that semiotics to him implies a linguistic approach. While this may be the case more often than not, Turino's work offers a polemic against such a quick association.

12 Turino's 1999 article was obviously a great help in writing this paper. Readers of that piece will also notice that my take on Peirce's model of the sign differs somewhat from his—in particular, I follow Sheriff's work in understanding that all signs have first, second, and thirdness; therefore, no sign may be "halted" before reaching thirdness as Turino suggests (232). Rather, I would argue that the systemic or conventional aspects of music are something like a "language," though not a referential one, in which cultural actors are educated to recognize certain associations as genuine— for example, the sounds which music theorists call V7. I create an interpretent of closure which those trained in the more referential symbols of musical theory can name "cadence." Without the verbal terms to articulate this, the thirdness of music is a less symbolic kind—a second-thirdness perhaps—but it nonetheless provides a basis of habit for the interpretation of signs. I find this recognition of non-linguistic thirdness to be absolutely crucial for a relativist conception of musical signs, as opposed to one which sees emotion as residing in sound itself, thus eliminating the human interpretor and his/her prior experiences that culturally-specifically ground significance.

13 Daniel offers a definition of culture as "a loosely integrated system of signs created dialogically in the communicative act between an anthropologist and his informants" (1984:229) that should provide the antidote to such a misreading of semiotic with regard to "culture." See also Sheriff 1994:53.

14 After we both attended a lecture by a Peircean scholar, an audience member asked me "Doesn't it feel like you're listening to a Scientologist?" Peirceans do get excited enough about the theory to make such claims as "it gives us a theory of cosmic and human meaning that. . . [leads] to the possibility of unlimited intellectual and moral growth and *of unlimited survival* for the human community" (Sheriff 1994:xvi). If this raises intellectual defenses, it in part relates back to classical debates between the Stoics and Sceptics—while Peirce's thought is Stoical in many respects, much contemporary theory is in a more Sceptical mode (Barnouw 1986). Perhaps most crucially, Peirce's teleology speaks to a belief in the unidirectional, progressive development of human knowledge, a view that seems optimistic at best, or in uglier terms, it suggests a sanction of history as written by the "winners" of violent confrontations. Peirce's century-old vocabulary should not render him automatically anachronistic. For example, by "science," Peirce apparently meant something akin

to "discipline" in the academic sense, referring to intellectual endeavors which are responsible to and account for learning that has gone before. By engaging "the literature" in academic work, we are accepting something like Peirce's "science" as a framework, even if our disciplines (anthropology, literary studies, folklore) may be fleeing "scientific" methods and terms as quickly as they can. (See Sheriff 1994:19).

15 Saussure's influence is so ubiquitous that it hardly needs proponents, but for an argument in favor of a rereading of semiology in the present theoretical context, see Thibault (1999). This lecture can be found on the world wide web, along with a number of other lectures and links on semiotics, including some dealing with Peirce.

16 This logic is similar to what Peirce called "abduction." For a discussion of abduction as it relates to qualitative field research, see Amanda Coffey and Paul Atkinson (1996).

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