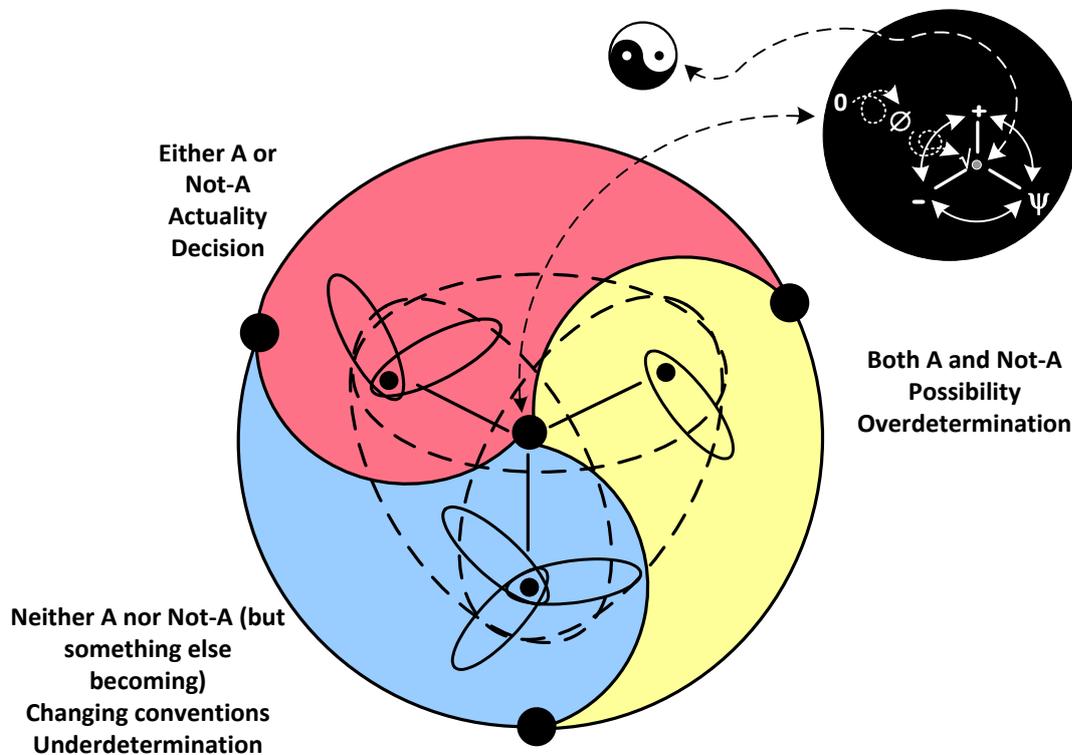


Floyd Merrell- From Emptiness to Possible Possibility to Something

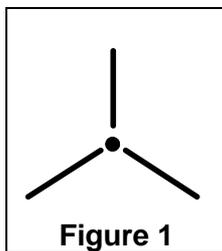
<http://web.ics.purdue.edu/~fmerrell/fromemptiness.htm>



What's the image all about?

From **Emptiness** to **Possible Possibility** to **Something**

Allow me to go to the beginning, whenever and wherever that might have been within some timespacesingularity.

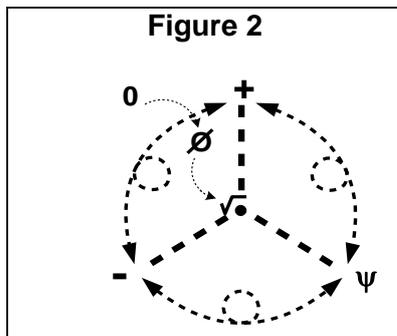


There is the C. S. Peirce *tripod*(Figure 1).

Yes, a tripod. Why? Because Peirce was a triadophobe—some might say a triadomaniac—but we can't dwell on this aspect of Peirce (for further see C. Hookway, *Peirce*, Routledge, 1985). Again, why a **tripod**?

Because of its **three-dimensionality on a two-dimensional plane (we live in a 3-D world but textuality is limited to 1-D linearity on a 2-D plane)**. Because its three legs afford a **premonition of broken symmetry, having evolved from a mere point or zero to one and then division, or two, and three.**

Because its legs can—syncopatedly, when at their best—wobble and waver and flip themselves around in fluid rather than fixed fashion. In short, because it is a metaphorical image of what gives the appearance of structure, yet it is process (in this vein, and if you find yourself so inclined, you might give the enclosed article, [SEMIOLGY MEETS SEMIOTICS: A CASE OF LINGERING LINGUICENTRISM?](#) a click, as well as the ‘telegraphically’ suggestive powerpointdisplays, [SEMIOTICA.PPT](#) and [SYNCOPATION.PPT](#)).



The tripod image (Figure 2), in this manner, gives a hint of possibilities for future engenderment of *signness*. Or better, it gives a hint of *possible possibilities*, for there is not (yet) *anything* at all.

There is no more than passage—fluid as it were—beginning with zero, ‘nothingness’, or ‘emptiness’. Zero, like ‘nothingness’ or ‘emptiness’, is in C. S. Peirce’s words, the ‘initial condition, before the universe existed’; it was not a state of pure abstract being. On the contrary it was a state of just nothing at all, not even a state of emptiness, for even emptiness is something’ (*Collected Papers* [CP]: 6.215). As Shakespeare asks in *Macbeth*, nothing is, but what is not? Perhaps we can say that pure ‘is not’, ‘nothingness’, or ‘emptiness’, is ‘absolute nothing’, ‘absolute emptiness’, if we can use language at all in this context. It is like ‘pure zero’, ‘boundless freedom’ (CP: 6.215).

Zero is something you have to write to show that there is nothing. But deep down we don’t really like zero; it’s just the fill beside the integers, which are what’s really important. Zero is the prose that gives us a hint about what *possibly might have been*, or *possibly will have been*. It is the pause that relaxes, before it puts things into action. ‘Things’ and ‘action’. Now we’re getting down to the nitty-gritty real world of everyday living. Mathematicians study zero as that which is devoid of numbers, but that which can give rise to the engenderment of any and all numbers. Geometers study the ‘zero space’ that their figures don’t occupy, and topologists study knots by exploring the spaces where the knots are not. What is not in the knot is more important than what the knot *is*, for *without the is not, there is no is, no knot*.

‘Nothingness’. Like zero, when it changes, it vanishes into something. ‘Nothingness’ is presumably perfect, and thus not very interesting. According to a current theory, *the universe started with a perfectly symmetrical virtual nothing, and then it became meaningful as something, or better, as what is becoming something other than what it was becoming*.

In this sense, contemporary physics tells us that you can get something from ‘nothingness’, contrary to Lewis Carroll’s White Queen, and to Shakespeare’s King Lear. In fact, *just as zero engenders all numbers, so also the original ‘nothingness’ contains the wherewithal for engendering everything*.

In Figure 2, zero fades into the 'empty set' (the noticed absence of something that *was*, or in the future *might be*), and then to *a possibly possible singularity*, $\sqrt{\bullet}$, to a choice between one thing (+) and its other (–), and to mediation (ψ) of one thing and its other as well as mediation of that selfsame mediator with them.

During this process, 'emptiness' morphed into mere *possible possibility* and mediation of the implication of that *possible possibility* by a mediator that is, itself, part of the process just coming into the initial stage of becoming (for perhaps some insight on this topic in equally 'telegraphic prose', try clicking [ZERO.PPT](#) and [MEDIATION.PPT](#), if you wish).

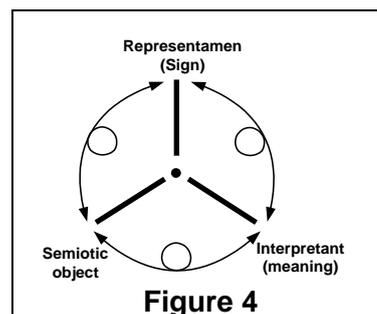
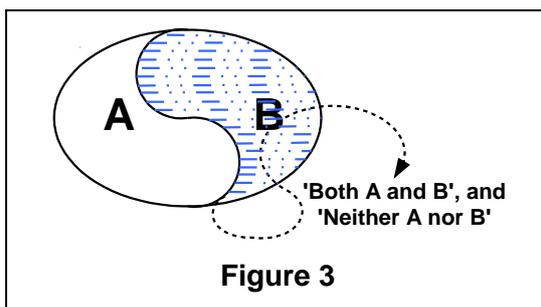
And why the $\sqrt{\bullet}$? And the + and the –, or \pm ? The sign, $\sqrt{\bullet}$, is tantamount to the imaginary number, $\sqrt{-1}$, or to be more explicit, $\pm\sqrt{-1}$. Just as *the imaginary number is a possibility that stands hardly a chance of becoming actualized in the real physical world of concrete, practical everyday living*, so also $\sqrt{\bullet}$ and some *possibility* (+) and that *possibility's* counterpart (–) and *mediation* (ψ) of both of them, can hardly become a meaningful sign as long as they remain unactualized.

But the beauty of *possible signness*, is that in many cases—though by no means all cases—the *possible signness* can enter into the process of *signness-becoming*. So much for *possibilities*(you might peruse [MIDDLEWAY.PPT](#) first, and then [NAGARJUNA.PPT](#)).

How can signness-becoming begin? By *drawing a distinction* that separates something from something else, + from –, right from wrong, good from evil, and so on.

Once a distinction has been made, is whatever became and what didn't become or shouldn't have become set in concrete? Of course not.

There is always the possibility, from the third leg of the tripod, by way of mediation, or the 'middle way', of something else, something spontaneous, fresh, and new, to begin its becoming.



Consider an oval and a line dividing one half of it from the other half (Figure 3). We have something (A) and something else (B), or A and Not-A, and the necessary line of demarcation between them. But what is the line? Is it A? No. Is it B? Negative also. But as Not-A it has something in common with B: it is Not-A. And as Not-B it has something in common with A: it is Not-B.

In a manner of speaking, then, it is both A (as Not-B) and B (as Not-A) as a result of this sharing quality; and yet it is neither A nor B, for it is Not-A and it is Not-B. It is both, contradictorily or inconsistently speaking, and it is neither, incomplete,

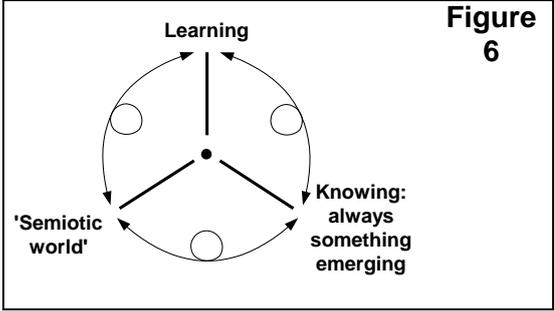
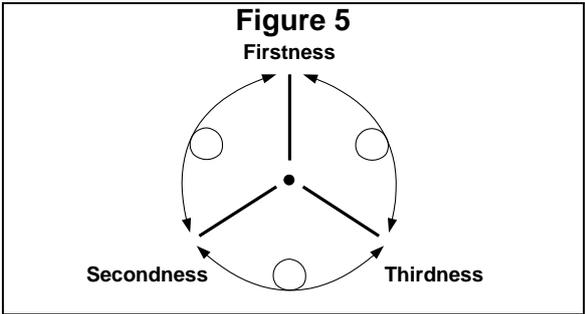
deficiently, or unfinishedly speaking, because there is the *possibility* of something else emerging from the line of demarcation (which, like any line, geometrically speaking, it is made up of an infinity of infinitesimal points or ‘nothings’ or ‘emptinesses’, so to speak).

In other words, the line is in a two-dimensional sense tantamount to $\sqrt{\bullet}$, as a visible or symbolic simulacrum emerging out of ‘ $0 \rightarrow \emptyset \rightarrow \dots$ ’, or ‘emptiness’, and the ‘empty set’ (for the pragmatic nature of the ‘empty set’, you might click on [IT.PPT](#)).

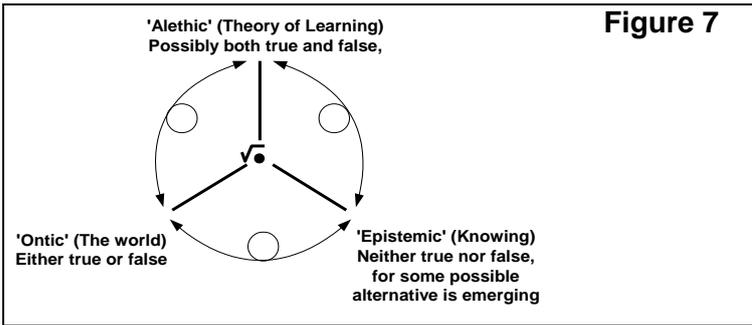
Just as a solitary point can give rise to the becoming of a line, a line can give rise to the becoming of a plane, a plane can give rise to the becoming of a cube, and a cube can give rise to the becoming of a four-dimensional hypercube, so also the ‘semiotic tripod’ as *possible possibility* can give rise to the becoming of *signness*.

(for a study in interdimensionalities, see [KLEINBOTTLE.PPT](#), [GODELCOMPLEXITY.PPT](#), and [NEWGODEL.PPT](#)).

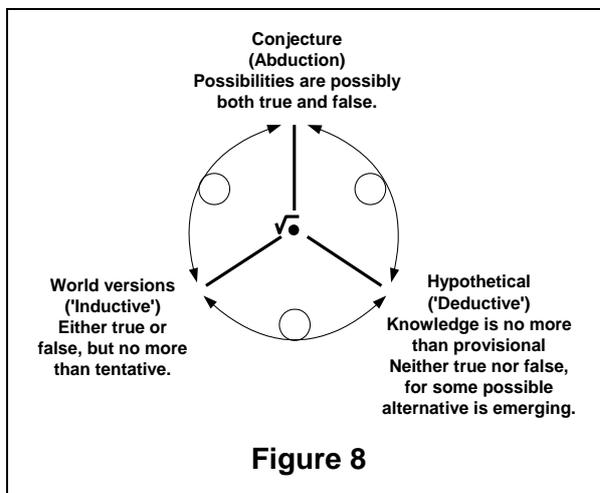
Thus we have the tripod as a model of *signness-becoming* fleshing out the three Peircean sign components (*Representamen, Semiotic Object, Interpretant*) (Figure 4), the three categories of sign processes, physical world processes and mental processes (*Firstness, Secondness, Thirdness*) (Figure 5), and learning about signs, the world and the mind, and Peirce’s three modes of discovery, from *possibility to actuality to provisional knowing*, as seen in their corresponding images (Figure 6).



Notice that in the latter two tripods, *Alethic, Ontic, and Epistemic* (Figure 7) are no more than *what is possible (possibly both true and false), what is tentatively either true or false, and what is indeterminate (neither true nor false)*, for some alternative always stands a chance of emerging into the light of day (these figures carry the implication of the ‘ $0 \rightarrow \emptyset \rightarrow \sqrt{\bullet} \rightarrow + \rightarrow - \rightarrow \psi \rightarrow \dots n$ ’ progression, the whole concoction of which might be in the Peirce sense labeled ‘*cosmology*’ (with respect to which you might entertain the notion of clicking [COSMOLOGY.PPT](#)).



Notice, moreover, how the legs of the tripod mesh with that which can become **(creatively, improvisingly, spontaneously) conjectured (or abducted (or abducted, through abduction))** to appropriate Peirce's third element of logic to complement the classical logical terms, *induction* and *deduction*) (Figure 8).



What is conjectured, is, at the moment of **the conjecture, possibly both true and false.** But, in the most successful of possible worlds, **it stands a chance of becoming a part or the whole of a world version, that which might be conventionally considered under no uncertain terms either true or false, even though as in the case of any and all worlds version, it can be no more than tentative.** It must be considered tentative, for knowing is no more than provisional, for during some unexpected moment, some alternative to an apparently irresolvable problem might be in the process of emerging into the light of day.

Notice, in addition, that the central image appearing at the initiation of this webpage begins, significantly, with **the Yin-Yang symbol, that 'contradictory complementary coalescent' liquid, flowing whirlpool giving rise to all that is becoming something other than what it was becoming according to Dao philosophy.**

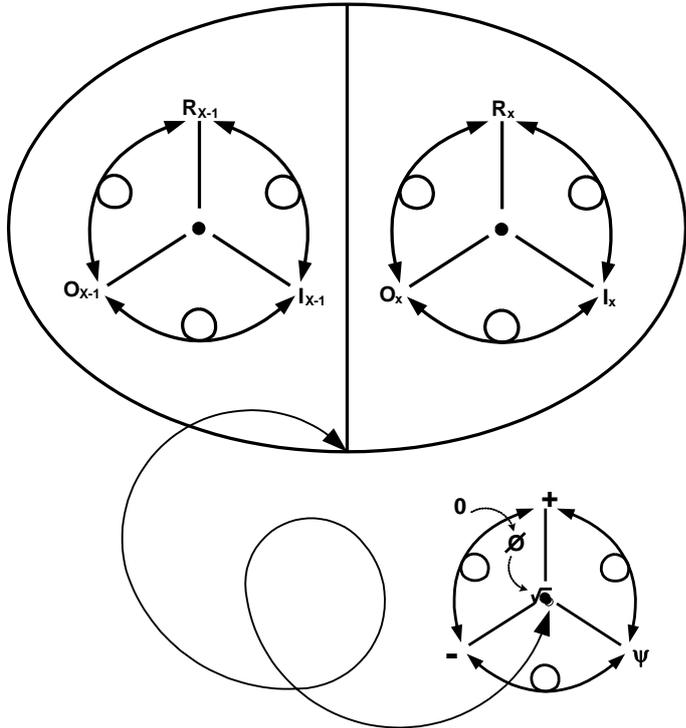
Notice how the two-way arrow leads from the Dao symbol to the tripod *possible possibility of signness*, and how on the right side of the image we have the Dao centered symbol—significantly, three-way rather than two way—of the becoming of *signness*, from Representamen or sign (R), to Semiotic Object (O), and to Interpretant(I). And notice how the large central sphere offers a sense of the tripod in terms of elongated ovals depicting Firstness, Secondness and Thirdness.

Finally, notice how, in the large central sphere of the image:

- (1) the solitary oval, depicting Firstness, bears the idea of *possibly both one alternative and another alternative (+ and -),*
- (2) the Secondness oval depicts *either one of the two alternatives or the other one having been selected and a mark of distinction having been drawn in order to honor the classical logical either/or imperative intact, at least provisionally, and*
- (3) the Thirdness oval gives an idea that, **in the long run, neither the one alternative nor the other alternative is capable of establishing carved in granite certitude and indubitable knowledge, but rather, some other possible alternative might find itself seeping up from the erstwhile mark of demarcation to bring about the emergence of something new** (see [DAOWATER.PPT](#)).

The sphere of Firstness can be qualified as *overdetermined*, since, given the virtually inexhaustible range of *possible possibilities*, at different times and places what would otherwise be considered contradictory or inconsistent alternatives can find a happy resting place within the sphere of Secondness.

The sphere of thirdness can be qualified as *underdetermined*, since between one alternative and another one, and perhaps another one, and so on, some hitherto unknown alternative might slither up to make its presence known (for the set of terms, *overdetermined* and *underdetermined*, and relevant Peircean terms, *vagueness* and *generality*, and Gödelian *inconsistency* and *incompleteness*, which are all germane to the figures presented above, see [BODYMIND FLOWS](#); [OVERDETERMINATION, UNDERDETERMINATION, INDETERMINATION](#); [PEIRCEVAGUEGENERAL.PPT](#); and [TRUEREAL.PPT](#)).



In order to encapsulate this whole shebang, allow me to suggest an all-encompassing image (Figure 9).

It suggests a sign with subscripts 'X-1' and its alternative, and another sign, with subscripts 'X', both of them having emerged from '0 → ∅ → + → - → √• → ψ' as the *possible possibility of signness*. The two signs in the oval are distinguished by a line of demarcation, which allows for the emergence of one or more of a virtually unlimited number of overdetermined possibilities one of which might take the place of one of the underdetermined signs that up to that juncture had been considered qualifiable as legitimized knowing (you might look at [GALEANO.PPT](#) and [ONTHEFRINGE.PPT](#)).

And we are back to the beginning. That is to say, we have journeyed from zero to the empty set to the *possible possibility of signness* to signs becoming signs, and ultimately, if indeed we might wish to consider ourselves more than mere finite and tenderly fallible human animals, we might create for ourselves a sense of our having encompassed the entire universe of signs, our world version and all other world versions to boot, in the past, at present, and as *possibly possible future world versions*. As such, we find ourselves within the entire concoction of world versions and at the same time it will be as if we were outside, holding this entire concoction in

our conceptual embrace. These world versions, including and at the same time excluding ourselves, will be comparable to George Spencer-Brown's words in *Laws of Form* (E. P. Dutton, 1979, p. 105):

We may take it that the world undoubtedly is itself (i.e. is indistinct from itself), but, in any attempt to see itself as an object, it must, equally undoubtedly act so as to make itself distinct from, and therefore false to itself. In this condition it will always partially elude itself (in this vein, you might take another look at [COSMOLOGY.PPT](#)).

Thank you. I have genuinely appreciated your patience.
floyd merrell

