

“You See a Cloud Rising”

On a gantry over the M5 motorway outside Exeter, there is a large electronic sign that normally displays information about traffic conditions, road works and so on. For a little while the sign has been showing the message, “Sign not in use.” I always chuckle to myself when I see this. For of course the sign *is* in use: it is being used to convey the message that it is not in use.

When I tell people I’m interested in signs I am often met with rather puzzled looks. What do I mean by ‘signs’? What is there to say about them? That most people haven’t heard of the academic field of semiotics – the philosophical study of signs and signification – doesn’t particularly surprise or upset me. What is interesting about those blank looks is that they reflect the fact that we are normally almost entirely unaware of our immersion in a world of signs, and equally unaware of our continual and habitual interpretations of those signs.

In truth, we live and move and have our being in a sea of signs – some of them made deliberately for the purpose of signifying, others simply aspects of the natural world that are capable of providing information. Within this medium of ‘signification’ we are like fish in water, completely dependent on our capacity to navigate the world of signs but mostly unaware of the medium itself. Indeed, if we were fully conscious of our constant interpretations of our surroundings we would come to a standstill. Just as our internal bodily functions work best if left to the unconscious parts of our nervous system, so most of our navigation of the world of signs is best done subconsciously. This is why a road sign can be programmed with the message “sign not in use” without much risk that the general driving population will worry about such a self-referential contradiction. In fact, the very need to display this message is itself a reflection of our propensity automatically to seek out meanings in things. Presumably, the concern of the Highways Agency is that if the sign is left blank its very blankness will be open to misinterpretation – taken, for example, as a sign that there are no major hazards ahead when perhaps there may be.

So, we interpret signs without thinking, as we must if we are not to become paralysed by unnecessary internal semiotic analysis. Signs

are ever-present but almost completely invisible to us at a conscious level; for our self-preservation and sanity, our minds have evolved that way. One of the tasks of Part I of this book will be to enable you to bring some aspects of signs and their interpretations to the forefront of your awareness. This is not so that you can permanently reverse the transparency of signs: that would be impractical and possibly dangerous. Rather, it is so that every now and again you might choose to notice something of the structure of representation and interpretation. My thesis is that by foregrounding the nature of signs, we encounter the most fundamental aspects of being and thereby meet with the reality and closeness of God.

In order to show how that may be so, we will begin by examining the different kinds of relationship between signs and the things they signify. As the book progresses, we will find that signification has many dimensions. When we consider these further dimensions of signification, we will see that certain underlying patterns emerge. My suggestion is that these underlying patterns are related in some way to the 'three-ness' of God's inner being.

Why, though, would it be of any interest to find some sort of parallel between the structure of signs and the ways in which Christian theologians have found themselves compelled to speak about God? In other words, what could be gained by seeking a new way of articulating a trinitarian understanding of how God relates to the world?

The short answer to this lies in the recognition of a paradox at the heart of Christian belief. The paradox is this: affirmation of God as Trinity is supposed to be the touchstone of Christian orthodoxy, yet it is difficult to see that belief in the Trinity really makes much difference to the everyday thoughts and lives of ordinary Christians. As the twentieth-century German theologian Karl Rahner once put it: "despite their orthodox confession of the Trinity, Christians are, in their practical life, almost mere 'monotheists'." The same passage continues: "We must be willing to admit that, should the doctrine of the Trinity have to be dropped as false, the major part of religious literature could well remain virtually unchanged."¹

Of course, I would be a fool to suggest that things have not moved on since Rahner wrote that in 1967. In the last few decades there has been a genuine revival of interest in the Trinity, at least within academic Christian thought. However, I venture to suggest that things have not changed as much as some would like to suppose.

1 Karl Rahner, *The Trinity* (New York: Crossroad Herder, 1999, first published in German 1967), pp. 10-11.

New books on the Trinity are continually appearing and many Christian theologians go to great lengths to assert their trinitarian credentials. But note that in the passage quoted above Rahner refers to the *practical* life of Christians, and I have my doubts about how much effect the resurgence of academic interest in the Trinity has had on ordinary Christian understanding and practice.

I know that some contemporary defenders of the relevance of trinitarian thought would immediately disagree with me, pointing out that the great insight of trinitarian theology is that all being is 'relational', and that a recognition of the inherent relationality of existence has enormous potential to influence the way we live our lives. Understanding God as persons-in-relation gives us a moral imperative to resist selfish individualism and build better communities. While I welcome this ethical impulse, I fear that seeing it as the main conclusion to be drawn from trinitarian thought amounts to a domestication of the Trinity, leaving the really radical implications of the doctrine untouched. It's not that I think that all talk of trinitarian relationality is misguided. Rather, I think that in its common forms it risks short-changing us. If there is something important in the doctrine of the Trinity, then it must be more than a rather general lesson about the relational basis of reality, a lesson that we could certainly have learned in other ways. And if we just want to invoke the Trinity to vindicate a perspective that we wish to adopt anyway, then aren't we getting things rather the wrong way round? There must, surely, be more to trinitarian thought than this.

The key to understanding what this 'more' might be lies, I want to suggest, in the structure of signs.



Luke tells us that a growing crowd had been so enthusiastic to hear Jesus speak they had been climbing over one another to get to the front. Those who managed to get near enough would have heard the following somewhat exasperated observation:

When you see a cloud rising in the west, you immediately say, "It is going to rain"; and so it happens. And when you see the south wind blowing, you say, "There will be scorching heat"; and it happens. You hypocrites! You know how to interpret the appearance of earth and sky, but why do you not know how to interpret the present time? (Luke 12: 54-56)²

2 In the similar saying in Matthew 16: 2-3, Jesus refers to "signs of the times."

The obvious and perfectly proper question we might ask ourselves about this passage is: What did Jesus mean by interpreting the signs of the present time, and what inferences did he wish his hearers to draw about the relation of the present to the future? I ask you, though, to set aside that question for the moment, and instead consider some more mundane questions about signs in general: What is a sign, and what different kinds of sign are there? What is happening when we interpret the appearance of a cloud as a sign that rain is on the way, or the direction of the wind as a predictor of how warm the weather will be?

In Jesus' illustration the cloud is a sign of (it can be taken to stand for, represent or signify) impending rain. The simplest answer to the question, "what is a sign?" is: a sign is *something that stands for something else*. The question of what exactly is required for something to be able to signify something else will be the subject of our investigations in this chapter and the next. For the moment, it is enough to say that when I use the term 'representation', I am referring to something that stands for, or that signifies, something. When I use the word 'signification', I am referring in a fairly vague way to what is going on when a sign is taken to represent something other than itself.

I suggested at the beginning of the chapter that we are not normally aware of the fact that we make our way in the world by continually interpreting the various kinds of sign around us. One of the curious effects of this transparency of signs is that we don't usually stop to reflect on how peculiar it is that anything should ever stand for something else. Why would we want to take something to represent something different? Another question that might occur after realizing the importance of signs in our lives is: Does the world have to have any particular 'structure' for it to be possible for things to have meanings or significance, for something to be taken as something other than what it is? We may begin to find some clues if we think through the various ways in which something can stand for something else.

In what way does a cloud rising in the west signify the likelihood of rain, or a wind blowing from the south give rise to an expectation of a scorching heat? We might say that the kinds of sign Jesus is referring to here are 'natural' signs. The signs he uses to illustrate his point are aspects of the natural world that we have learned to interpret in order to make predictions about the weather. If we see clouds we can predict rain; if the wind turns southerly we can (in some parts of the world) predict warmer weather. And our predictions based on these signs are reasonably reliable. As Jesus says, "and it happens."

Why is it that clouds and wind can act as fairly reliable signs of what sort of weather to expect? The answer is that there is an actual

causal connection between the sign (clouds) and the thing the sign is taken to stand for (imminent rain). The clouds contain the moisture that may fall as rain, so the presence of clouds (rather than clear blue sky) increases the chance that it is going to rain.

The American philosopher–scientist Charles Peirce devised an elaborate set of terms to describe various aspects of the structure of signs. Many of his terms are notoriously obscure, but an aspect of his terminology that has become quite established is his distinction between three kinds of way in which a sign can stand for an object. Peirce labelled these three kinds of ‘sign–object relation’ indexes, icons and symbols. We will come to icons and symbols shortly. The kind of sign involved when we interpret the appearance of the sky as a predictor of the weather is an index. An index is a sign that is related to its object by some direct connection. Clouds are a sign of rain because rain (the ‘object’) comes from clouds (the ‘sign’). There is a direct causal link between clouds and rain, so that even if it is not raining at the moment we may take the presence of clouds as a sign (index) of an increased chance of rain.

In my work as a medical doctor, I am continually interpreting indexical signs. The signs and symptoms of disease are indexes. A certain kind of rash is a sign of chicken-pox because the chicken-pox virus has a particular kind of effect on the skin. A certain kind of pattern on an electrocardiogram is a sign that a heart attack has occurred, because damage to heart muscle has a particular kind of effect on the conduction of electrical impulses through the heart.

It is no coincidence that the founders of the field of semiotics were the Ancient Greek physicians. Medicine depends on the interpretation of signs. Of course, interpretations can be mistaken – signs can be misinterpreted. This feature of signs and their interpretations can be seen particularly clearly in the case of indexical signs. The clouds may be blown elsewhere, so the rain may not arrive. A rash may currently have the appearance merely of an allergy but subsequently become typical of meningitis.

If interpretations are inherently unreliable, why do we make so much use of them? Again, indexical signs give us some clues. The reason we choose to take notice of signs is often that they are more readily accessible than the things they represent. I don’t have a crystal ball that would enable me to see perfectly into the future, so I cannot predict the weather with certainty; but the presence of certain indexical signs (clouds, wind, etc.) enables me to improve my ability to predict what is likely to happen beyond the level of pure guesswork. I cannot easily examine the state of a patient’s

heart, but I can tell quite a lot by recording the electrical impulses detectable after placing electrodes on the skin of their chest. We use indexical signs as surrogates for more direct information. The ideal would be perfect knowledge, but we have to take the risk of being in error where perfect knowledge is impossible or impractical to obtain. In that sense, the interpretation – and misinterpretation – of indexical signs is a reflection of our finite creaturely nature. Only God is omniscient. The rest of us, in the present order of things, have to make do with fallible kinds of sign.

Signs, then, can be misleading; they can be misinterpreted. However, they are not always misleading. That may appear to be stating the obvious, but there is an influential strand of semiotic thinking that regards signs and interpretations as free-floating, operating at an entirely different level from the actual reality of things, never making contact with anything that one might call the truth. This school of semiotic thinking can arguably be traced to the work of the Swiss linguist, Ferdinand de Saussure. It had a great influence on the tone of philosophical thought in Continental Europe during the twentieth century. At risk of over-generalization, we may say that Saussure's 'semiology', in contrast to Peirce's semiotics, fails to recognize that signs and interpretations are able to connect with reality. Postmodern forms of relativism often suggest that every interpretation is as good as any other, because there is no ultimate reality against which interpretations can be checked. Or, if there is such a reality, interpretations have no purchase on it.

One antidote to this surprisingly beguiling position is the recognition of indexical forms of sign-object relation. When we think about indexical signs we can see how this particular aspect of the structure of signification is capable of connecting with reality, albeit fallibly. If I make an error of diagnosis and my patient comes to harm they will, unfortunately, not be convinced if I argue that the adverse outcome is merely a matter of interpretation. If the rash was, after all, an indication of meningitis rather than of an allergy, then the infection that I have failed to diagnose really will pose a serious danger to them. If I correctly interpret the presence of ST-segment elevation on their electrocardiogram as an early sign of heart attack, then the action that I take really may save their life. When Thomas wanted verification of the resurrection appearances of Jesus, he stipulated that he must be able to put his finger in the marks of the nails in Jesus' hands. He was asking to see indexical signs that the risen Lord was the same man who had been crucified.

So, although signs are fallible, they do have the capacity to put us in touch with reality. We seek to refine our interpretations in order to increase the degree to which they are able inform us about that reality. Weather forecasting is notoriously difficult. The government invests money in the Meteorological Office rather than in, say, astrology precisely because indexes – whether simple ones like the presence of clouds, or more complex ones such as the patterns of air pressure shown on weather charts – have the potential to connect our knowledge (and predictions) with the truth.



Another way in which a sign can be related to an object is as a ‘symbol’. In a sense, a symbol is the exact opposite of an index. Whereas an indexical sign (such as a symptom) has a direct, often causal connection with its object, a symbol has no direct connection at all with the thing it signifies. The word ‘symbol’ originally derives from a combination of the Greek *sun* (syn), meaning ‘with’, and *bole*, meaning a ‘throw’. A symbolic sign is a sign that has been thrown together with its object. That is to say, a symbol could stand for anything; the fact that we take it to stand for any particular object is purely a convention. We cut with a knife and skewer with a fork. The words ‘knife’ and ‘fork’ are symbols: strings of letters with an arbitrary (though conventionally accepted) relation to the things they represent. It would be physically difficult to cut with a fork and skewer with a knife, but easy (once we got used to it) to call the sharp thing a fork and the pronged thing a knife.

In semiotic terminology, the word ‘symbol’ therefore has a specific meaning. This can be confusing, because in ordinary parlance ‘sign’ and ‘symbol’ are often taken to mean the same thing. In semiotics, a symbol is a particular kind of sign. We use conventional signs (symbols) all the time. Words are a familiar example, as illustrated above. Language would be very restricted without symbolic signs of this kind (knife, fork, table, chair, dog, cat, etc.). However, words are not the only kind of symbol. Shapes, colours, indeed anything, can be chosen to act as a symbolic sign. We choose red to signify ‘stop’ and green to signify ‘go’, though other colours might have served the same purpose. In the United States a \$1 bill is physically quite similar to a \$100 bill (confusingly so, for those of us used to recognizing the denomination of a bank note by its colour). Yet the value assigned by convention to these two green rectangles of paper with their particular numerals and decorative patterns is very different.

Why is it so important to be able to represent things with signs that have no direct relationship to their objects? We have just seen how the usefulness of indexical signs lies in their connection with reality, and this is precisely what symbolic signs lack. By definition, a symbol is a sign whose relation to its object can be arbitrary – it is not determined by any direct connection between the two. Indeed, the advantage of symbolic signs stems from precisely that fact. Because such signs are not in any way tied to their objects they can be easily manipulated; that is, they can be presented, moved around and arranged in different combinations in a way that the objects themselves cannot. If I say to you “I think I just saw the cat chasing the dog,” you might reply, “No, I’m sure it was the dog chasing the cat.” Using the symbols ‘dog’ and ‘cat’ enables these two scenarios to be described without recourse to the performance of an awkward sequence of mimes. Similarly, I can tell a story without having to reassemble all the people involved and physically re-enact what happened. Words are more easily corralled than people or things. Indeed, I can construct a fictional narrative by combining recognized symbols into sequences that do not match the way things have ever actually been.

Anthropologist Terrence Deacon has suggested that the capacity to use symbols is what makes humans unique.³ The reason it is so difficult to teach language to non-human primates, he argues, is that the human mind has a very specific capacity for dissociating signs from the world and manipulating them independently of the things they represent. Perhaps the writer of the second creation account in Genesis had a similar intuition about the nature of human distinctiveness:

So out of the ground the Lord God formed every animal of the field and every bird of the air, and brought them to the man to see what he would call them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name. (Genesis 2: 19)

Humans, uniquely, make a deliberate habit of giving names – attaching symbols – to other things, animate and inanimate. I shall have more to say about the distinctiveness of human sign-use in a later chapter. At this stage it is worth flagging up what I see as a recurrent problem with the use of the term ‘symbol’. I have just set out the meaning of the word symbol in the ‘technical’ context of the philosophy of signs (in this context, a symbol is a sign with a

3 Terrence Deacon, *The Symbolic Species: The Co-evolution of Language and the Human Brain* (New York and London: W. W. Norton & Co., 1997).

conventional relation to its object). But in ordinary speech the word symbol has a different meaning. Let's call this its 'folk' meaning. The folk meaning of symbol is any kind of relatively sophisticated sign. For example, certain religious practices and images are often described as forms of symbolism. Someone might say that a particular tribal ritual should be described as 'symbolic', or that the Christian Eucharist functions as a symbol. Similarly, archaeologists may refer to the intriguing female figurines fashioned by our Ice Age ancestors 20-30,000 years ago as having had 'symbolic' functions, though we can only guess at what these little sculptures signified and to whom.

These non-technical meanings of the word 'symbol' often have connotations of an almost magical function, something with the potential to connect us rather mysteriously with a hidden reality. According to Carl Jung, symbols always point to something that is ultimately beyond reason, either because they refer to some transcendent reality, or because their meaning is constructed by our unconscious. In Dan Brown's bestseller, *The Da Vinci Code*, the protagonist is a 'symbolologist' whose heroic efforts to decipher a series of esoteric 'symbols' leads him to uncover a secret conspiracy at the heart of the Christian tradition. The symbolologist has further work to do in a sequel, *The Lost Symbol*. Perhaps the idea that there is a special kind of sign that has a particular power to keep the truth from us has particular resonance in our current cultural situation, in which people so often feel disempowered, and standard meanings and values are so much in question. In any case, symbols, in the folk sense of the word, can be taken to be divine or diabolical, but either way there is a sense that behind their efficacy lies some kind of hidden magic or mysterious power.

There is nothing necessarily wrong with the word symbol having two different meanings. The technical and folk meanings could happily coexist if they could each agree to keep to their appropriate habitat. The technical meaning (a sign whose relation to its object is given by a rule or convention) would be at home in academic contexts, while the folk meaning would be free to spice up airport novels. The problem is that academic disciplines, including psychology, anthropology and theology, have been all too happy to adopt an essentially folk understanding of symbols. That is to say, workers in these academic fields are too ready to label something as 'symbolic' without giving a clear account of what is meant by 'symbol' (whether in accordance with the technical semiotic definition or otherwise). For example, we may

like to describe the Christian Eucharist as 'symbolic', but unless we can clearly specify what we mean by this we risk making a vacuous statement. Like Molière's doctor, who attributes the sleep-inducing property of opium to the 'dormitive principle' within it, we too often implicitly accept that symbols perform their abstract representative function by virtue of some special power of, let's say, 'symbolization'. Unfortunately, this tells us nothing about how the sign in question actually works.

To put it more positively, I think we can say a lot more about religious sign-use than simply that it is 'symbolic'. Referring vaguely to the power of 'symbols' impoverishes philosophy and the human sciences because, as I shall explore towards the end of the book, I don't think our most powerful capacities for sign use depend purely on the use of symbols in the technical sense.⁴ It is also bad for religion because it encourages us to think that in 'symbolic' (folk-meaning) kinds of religious representation and ritual, something essentially mysterious or magical is going on. A genuinely semiotic perspective, in contrast, will focus our attention on some quite concrete and ordinary aspects of religious practices and beliefs.

Symbologists therefore beware! Insofar as we might understand signs as mysterious, the mystery is not to be approached via the arcane and the esoteric. The true mystery would be if the basis of God's self-communication and self-revelation turned out to be, as I hope to show, the *ordinary* structure of *everyday* signs.



So far we have considered two kinds of relation between signs and their objects: indexical (direct connections) and symbolic (conventional or rule-governed relations). The third way in which a sign can relate to its object is as an icon. The word derives from the Greek, *eikon*, meaning resemblance or image. An iconic sign is a sign that represents its object by resembling it in some way. A portrait represents its subject iconically because the painted image resembles the person depicted. Jesus, in Christian thinking, iconically represents God the Father: Jesus *resembles* the Father in some sense, a point to which we shall return in a later chapter when we consider the Incarnation. As Paul puts it in his letter to the Colossians (1: 15), Jesus is the image (*eikon*) of the invisible God.

4 In Chapter 11 I shall suggest that human distinctiveness rests on our ability to combine different kinds of sign and does not merely reflect our capacity to use one particular kind of sign-type, even symbols.

Like the word symbol, as well as its technical meaning in semiotics, icon has various less technical usages. The ordinary uses of the term have some relation to the technical meaning, but with additional connotations. We speak about people, places or events as ‘iconic’, meaning that they are representative, but also that they are in some way special exemplars. Marilyn Monroe was a ‘Hollywood icon’. The Statue of Liberty is an ‘iconic sight’ at the gateway to America. Neil Armstrong stepping onto the moon was an ‘iconic moment’ in twentieth-century history.

In addition, in religious contexts icons are works of art of particular devotional intent and significance. They are often elaborations on standard themes such as the Madonna and Child, and are produced with particular materials according to certain stylistic conventions. At this stage, though, I would like to steer the reader away from the religious connotations of the word ‘icon’. (I’m less worried about what we might call the Hollywood connotation of the term, which is unlikely to distract us too much.) Not that I have anything in principle against icons in the Byzantine sense. Undeniably, they are often beautiful and of great spiritual value. The problem with the overlap of terminology in this case is different from the problem in the case of the word ‘symbol’. With symbols, the folk use of the term is too vague for our purposes. With icons, the problem is that the religious use of the word is too religious! Focussing attention on religious ‘icons’ might lead us to the view that certain images (icons) are especially suited to connecting us with the reality of God. Such a view might then lead us to ask, primarily, “What special kinds of image (icon) are the most effective for bringing us into God’s presence?” There is nothing wrong with that, but I want to emphasize that my task is rather different. My aim, instead, is to ask how the structure of signs in general – ordinary signs as much as religious signs – is a reflection of the reality of God and the vehicle through which we encounter that reality. For that reason, I ask you to put aside the usual religious meanings that the word ‘icon’ may call to mind and discipline yourself to focus instead on everyday kinds of icon.

An icon in the technical semiotic sense is a sign that relates to its object by some kind of resemblance. We have seen that an obvious example is the way in which a portrait represents its subject by being a likeness of him or her. But images are not the only kind of icon. A diagram is also an iconic sign. Think, for example, of a circuit diagram. The real appearance of an electronic device may be a tangle of wires, components and connections. However, a

mere photograph of the mess will not be very useful if our aim is to understand how the device works. A circuit diagram (an iconic representation of the circuit) shows the relationships between the components of the device schematically. The relationship of likeness or resemblance between the diagram and the actual object is not one of visual appearance, but of the way in which the electronic components are functionally related to one another. A metaphor is another, less obvious, kind of icon. A metaphor is a verbal image, a way of expressing something about one kind of thing in terms of its similarity (in some respect) to another kind of thing.

In some ways icons are the simplest kind of sign – they are simply *like* what they signify. But note that this ‘simplicity’ does not necessarily imply a lack of internal structure. Metaphors, for example, are built up from words, at least some of which will be symbolic signs. Likewise, diagrams often have symbolic elements, such as the different symbols for a capacitor and a resistor in our example of a circuit diagram. A sign of one type may thus be a composite of various signs, some being of a different kind to that of the overall sign of which they are a part. We glimpse here the way in which sign-types are not related to one another hierarchically. Rather, they mutually interpenetrate and reciprocally support one another – a characteristic which will be relevant when we come to speak of the Trinity in semiotic terms.

We saw earlier that the usefulness of indexical signs (signs directly or causally related to their objects) is that they have the capacity to connect us directly with reality. Similarly, we saw that the usefulness of symbols (signs related to their objects by convention) lies in the way they can be rearranged and combined in ways that are independent of the actual things they represent. What, then, is the particular usefulness of icons? I have probably already said enough to indicate that their utility goes beyond their capacity to be aesthetically pleasing. The example of a diagram suggests, further, that a function of icons can be to bring some specific aspect of the object in question to the forefront of attention. The circuit diagram helps us understand how an electrical device works: it is a tool that enables us to disregard certain aspects of the actual tangle of wires of which the circuit is, in reality, constructed. A diagram draws to our attention the salient features of the components and connections of the device and away from other aspects of its construction which are incidental to its function. The example of a metaphor suggests that another function of icons is to bring to light similarities between apparently different things. If I say that God is

my rock, I express something about God in terms of something that is clearly not God. An icon is like its object in some respects, but unlike it in others. A portrait is like the person in certain aspects of appearance, but unlike them in being two-dimensional rather than three-dimensional.

An icon, then, has the capacity to bring to our attention certain features of the thing represented, often by excluding aspects of the object that are less relevant for the particular purpose in question. More generally, I think we could say that icons make things, or aspects of things, ‘present’ to us. The portrait makes the person depicted present to us even though they may be far away or long dead. The circuit diagram makes present to us important aspects of the relations between the components of the device so that we can better understand how the thing works. The metaphor makes a thing or event present to us in a fresh way, enabling us to see something about it that we might otherwise have missed or have been unable to express.



To summarize, we have seen that indexes are a kind of sign that has the potential to keep our thoughts anchored in reality. Symbols, in contrast, enable us to manipulate concepts and ideas in a way that is not possible with the kinds of sign that are more directly connected with their objects. Finally, icons are forms of representation that have the capacity to make aspects of reality experientially present to us in various ways. The medium of signs, which we normally navigate so effortlessly and subconsciously, turns out, in other words, to have some kind of structure.

The full implications of this structure, and of the structure of deeper dimensions of signs, will be explored in subsequent chapters. For the moment we may think of the analysis so far as like a test-drilling through the sub-strata of signification. Our preliminary exploration has hinted that there is a deeper structure to signs than the surface features reveal. I hope that what we have turned up so far may be enough to persuade you that it is worth digging a little further.