

THE PLAN:

Systems of Ideas &
Symbols:

Practised by CAMEO WOOD Student,
and by her published for the
benefit of others.



BENNINGTON,
Printed for *The Dean of Studies.*
MMIV

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Area of Concentration: **Systems of Ideas & Symbols**

Requested Faculty Committee:

1. Professor Verter (*Academic Advisor*)
2. Professor Cohen
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4. Professor Weber

Anticipated Graduation Date: **Spring 2006**

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Past & Projected Courses:

First Term	<i>Fall 2002</i>	Second Term	<i>Spring 2003</i>
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Mathematical Modelling 2. Semiotics 3. Holistic Healing 4. Witchcraft & Magic 		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Spacetime 2. History of Mathematics 3. Revolutions 4. Learning to Read Music 5. Visual Arts Lecture Series

Field Work Term: *Neoteny in Tokyo, Japan.*

Third Term	<i>Fall 2003</i>	Fourth Term	<i>Spring 2004</i>
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Philosophical Reasoning 2. Complexity Tutorial 3. Swarm Intelligence 4. The Classical Style 5. Visual Arts Lecture Series 		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Neurology 2. Biotechnology 3. Historical Fictions, Fictional Histories 4. Media Matrix 5. Social Interaction 6. Visual Arts Lecture Series

Field Work Term: *The Neuroscience Institute in La Jolla, California.*

Fifth Term	<i>Fall 2004</i>	Sixth Term	<i>Spring 2005</i>
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Emergence 2. Wittgenstein 3. Chemistry 4. Beginning Chinese 5. Complexity 6. Visual Arts Lecture Series 		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The Essay in Science 2. Chemistry 3. Music History 4. Statistics 5. Beginning Chinese 6. Visual Arts Lecture Series

Field Work Term: *Ray Kurzweil of Cambridge, Massachusetts.*

I Introductions

Pliny the Younger wrote, "Difficile est tenere quæ acceperis nisi exerceas"; "it is difficult to retain what you may have learned unless you practise it". I state on the cover of this document that this Plan is my practise; I mean this with full intention. Not only the professors of Bennington, but the students also must practise what they learn. This Plan has served more as a record of my practise than a statement of what I plan to become. However, one learns by doing at Bennington, so perhaps this travelogue of my journey is appropriate, after all.

The development of my Plan since my arrival at Bennington has been surprising and enlightening, raising more questions than answers; I believe this means I have begun to acquire an education deep in value. For the past year, I have attempted to interpret my world through a filter of *Systems of Ideas & Symbols*; Systems of diverse elements, Symbols as signifiers of meaning, Ideas shared, destroyed, and spread throughout history. This is an all-encompassing approach to thought—a study of the holistic nature of how human beings come to understand their surroundings, and communicate their interpretations to others through the Systems of Ideas & Symbols.

In order to explore Ideas, it seems critical to understand them first in both their present and past states; this travelling of ideological past through the future creates the opportunity to begin to weave networks of meaning—Systems of Ideas & Symbols. Exploring these *Systems* involves the analysis of the origins, evolutions, and effects of specific ideas and their correspondent signs within their cultural, religious, political, economic, and biological contexts. The discipline of *Systems of Ideas & Symbols* attends to the prevalent art, music, philosophical, religious, scientific, and political tensions surrounding a subject of inquiry. This method of study attempts to explore relationships in a holistic way not possible by a less interdisciplinary approach.

As my past three terms have progressed, I have struggled to understand the interconnectedness of my interests. Early on, I was concerned that perhaps this study of Systems of Ideas & Symbols was an easy escape from the exercise of narrowing my focus. While I felt this was not true from the beginning, I could not elucidate my reasoning, nor could I present such *feelings* as the whole construct of a supportable Plan. A wise man once told me, "In determining what someone is, one cannot learn their nature from what they say—only by what they do". Therefore, I set about examining the things that I actively pursued and deeply questioning what compelled me toward these topics in particular. I needed to understand what the *Systems of Ideas & Symbols* I discussed actually consisted of. I demanded specificity, and hoped that upon discovery and examination, I would find the justification.

The First Term

During my first term at Bennington, I explored inspiring historical documents; during this time I practised my own nascent ideas about them, which proved to inspire my Plan through the progression of my subsequent terms.

Giordano Bruno's mnemotechnic guidebook, *On the Composition of Images, Signs, and Ideas*, became the subject of my first final project, wherein I analysed the text informed by *semiotics* and alchemy. My interest in Bruno stemmed from the secret, forbidden knowledge he was searching for, and the methods by which he interpreted his world through *Systems of Ideas & Symbols*. A concatenation of disciplines was required to be able to begin to understand this text, which incorporated history, memory systems, and theology, as well as both hermetic and classical philosophy. Bruno intended his book read not as a way of mastering sign production for memorization of words, facts or entire speeches, but understanding *ideas, signs, and images* in relation to God. Bruno drew on Platonic cosmology in his segregation of *divine ideas* and from the mortally tainted *shadows of ideas*. He was considering Plato's discussion of the origin of knowledge, using the Renaissance answer of *Divine Inspiration*. Even though Cicero had foreshadowed Bruno's ideas many centuries prior, some considered Bruno's ideas heretical and he eventually burned at the hand of The Inquisition for his ideas of theological semiotics.

My second major first term final project analysed the influence of the *Æthiopian Book of Enoch* upon the tradition of *Angelic languages* during the European renaissance. I had studied the ancient Ethiopian language called Ge'ez for the past four years with the express intent to understand the *Æthiopian Book of Enoch* in its earliest extant form, and this opportunity was an excellent exercise. I also studied the memoirs and publications of renaissance philosopher, mathematician, and astrologer *John Dee*, especially those published between 1587 through 1608 in which he discussed his conversations with angels and the language he termed "Enochian" that he credited angels with teaching him. The pervasive *signifier of Angelology* as an everyday aspect of renaissance life, as well as the legend of the lost *Æthiopian Book of Enoch*, had greatly *influenced* how Dee and the other scientists and academics of the period communicated with angels and understood the world around them.

The First Field Work Term

As a consultant for the Venture Capital firm Neoteny in Tokyo Japan, I was able to have intriguing discussions about the cultural differences in technology adoption between the East and the West. While there, I researched biometric security devices, and electronic voting solutions for a proposal to the Japanese Government. I also researched a potential free Voice over IP solution for the Nagano Prefecture. I rediscovered my love for business, and my boredom for computer programming. I need to find a happy medium.

The Second Term

I found my second term studies centred on scientific modes of thinking, inspiring me with the interconnectedness of ideas within systems of symbolic thought; the nature of my three final projects inspired a scientific analysis of traditionally non-scientific subjects while keeping the hermetic philosophies from the previous term in mind.

One of my most rewarding experiences during my second term was exploring the ideas of religious faith within the context of mathematics in *The History of Mathematics*. I studied the mathematical religion of Pythagoras and its worldview of reductionism, that 'all is number.' I also learned modern aspects of faith within Mathematics like the concepts of *Infinity* and *Gödel's Theorem*. I was searching for undeniable and troublesome concepts that forced a faith decision and then, a changed worldview, and what the consequent signs and ideas that were then built using these concepts as a core foundation.

I pursued the metaphysical aspect of modern physics through the *Many Worlds Interpretation of Quantum Mechanics*. I became interested in studying the interstices between science and faith and questioning the ways scientific philosophies affect a society and culture's worldviews. I attempted to understand other controversial (*and considered by some to be inconsequential*) theories of quantum mechanics. Since its first observance, there have been many readings of The Many Worlds Interpretation of Quantum Mechanics, but, because it is at this time impossible to disprove, it has demanded faith on the part of its supporters. Even today, this question has become a *philosophical* problem as well as a scientific one; what does it mean if all probabilities exist equally, and that all potentialities are manifest in *infinite other unknowable dimensions*? The systems of ideas & symbols created in this exercise of faith, helps one to understand *the limits of what we know to be "real"*.

While learning the history of revolutions, my explorations into *Enlightenment Automata* initially confused me within the context of my previous interests, and demanded a great deal of contemplation in order to understand its connection to my past pursuits. In exploring the history of Automata, I became interested in how the prevalent culture, society, and political structure perceived them, and the impact these perceptions had upon the perpetuation of the Cartesian philosophy of a *mechanistic universe*. Although the Automata could not do all of the things they were purported to be able to do (*such as the metabolisation of food into energy or the ability to champion a human being at chess*), they did enough to challenge what was understood to be our sovereign intrinsic humanness. When faced with this contrived paradigm change, the proposition that what *made us human was replicable* endorsed the idea of a mechanistic universe. The impact of this paradigm shift made a marked change upon the existing systems of ideas & symbols, causing new associations that has made science such a dominant force in our present, making religion & faith less of a vocation and more of a studied pastime. As a result, *Reasonable* men discarded Religious philosophy, heralding the arrival of the *Ghosts in the Machines*.

The Third Term

Consciousness became a pervasive presence within all of my studies this term; Questions were asked about the philosophical, cognitive, and dramatic manifestations of consciousness, and how we respond to consciousness in others. These patterns of consciousness lent themselves well to the study of Artificial Intelligence in biological systems, as well as questioning the unique ways humans identify themselves as being conscious.

Aristotle's *Poetics* discusses the role of *Recognition & Reversal* in classical Greek tragedy, and he describes the heightening of human drama with these two human reactions. The Classical Style of art and literature concerns itself with the Idea of a human aesthetic of beauty, form, and content and culminates in a distinctive style. More than style, Aristotle focuses on what *signifiers* make tragedy so human and painful to us; we identify with our own *contrived tragedies* so strongly. These concepts of *complexity and fortune* are intrinsically tied to our psyche and the way we interact with one another. The classical style speaks to this dynamic, but only to observe that it has existed as the most pervasive aspect of what makes us human and conscious since earliest record.

Philosophy of Mind grapples with the ideas of what makes us who we are; it inquires to the *nature of consciousness*, but as of yet, there has been no acceptable definition. This idea of a difference between humanity and all other forms of life is particularly applicable today when studying the modern dialogues about *Artificial Intelligence*. Philosophers question what it means to be a thinking being. Some, like Searle, doubt that non-humans will ever pass the *Turing Test*. I question if the construction of a test that all humans could pass is even possible. However, even reflected in my studies of Automata, human beings seem to have very serious emotions about their own humanity, and, with some exceptions, a resistance to anything that encroaches upon it. How do these ideas of consciousness inform our stories, film, and media about non-human consciousness? When considering consciousness or humanity, what makes something a living, thinking being *worthy of equality* with humans?

I became interested in what the other students in my Complexity tutorial termed, "*disembodied consciousness*"; I wanted to know if it would be possible to recognize a non-human conscious being if one existed. I began to study the forms that future robots will take: nanotechnology robots, particle swarms, self-directed military vehicles. I choose to focus on *Swarm Intelligence*, as its use is already quite pervasive; *biological intelligences*, such as flocks of birds, schools of fish, and colonies of ants are the models for the design of *distributed artificial intelligences*. These individuals of the swarm do not have intelligence singly, but together exhibit an *emergent intelligence*; they exhibit biological networks of communication and movement. Telecommunications networks, military vehicle design, and the study of the flow of neurons in the brain have all utilized Swarm Intelligence techniques.

Conclusions

The practise of learning the intricacies of my Plan has led me to observe my environment as a series of Systems of Ideas & Symbols. Each of my subjects of study informs the others in critical ways, allowing me to create unique networks of meaning.

I seek to find order in chaos, and meaning in tangled confusion. I work with networks of weighted meaning and importance, similar to Euler's graphs. Most of my studies thus far have revolved around one literary trilogy and a genre of culture. The trilogy, *His Dark Materials*, informs my Victorian and Enlightenment æsthetic, as well as many of my scientific interests. The genre of *Cyberpunk*, formed in the nineteen eighties and reflexively influenced by science-fiction, interface design, history, music, and technology, appeals to my scientific and technological æsthetic. Both of these subjects have informed my course choices and the way I have chosen to practise my learning.

The study of Systems is a creative act, requiring a vivid imagination and excellence in literary exposition. I have always felt the need to understand things as a whole, and be able to see the progressive evolution of systems. I feel that in order to study Systems of Ideas & Symbols, a driving passion must be felt to seek out human drama, the things that inspire us, that elate us, and that drive us to create things that had not been previously imagined.

I have discovered along this journey of mind that what I am most interested in are the Systems of Ideas & Symbols, and the interstices between faith and fact, and how choices between beliefs can change worldviews and how these affect the larger system. I am especially interested in secret, private, and subsequently alchemical beliefs. I want to pursue questions such as, *what kind of impact will the belief of the possibility of Artificial Intelligence or the existence of parallel worlds have, and how would those beliefs reflect on their understanding of existence, current scientific thought, and philosophy?* I want to seek out these subtle symbols of meaning and explore them, to understand the ideas that spread into larger systems of thought. This has become my practise.

*Written at my beautiful House
At Franklin.*

Anno.2004.March.14.

