Style Stands Still[0]

John M. Lawler
University of Michigan

Summary: We investigate the meaning(s) of the English word *style*, as presented in the *OED*, first by looking to its etymology (from Latin *stilus*, an instrument for writing on wax tablets), tracing that image back to the origins of cuneiform; thence by tracking the disparity between this word and *stylus*, which proves to be related to a different Indo-European root. These roots, and others with *st-* initials, are systematically presented, along with their modern descendants, and we see that the entire ontology of *style* recapitulates an ancient and powerful embodied image – the **Standing Man** – that illustrates the sacramental nature of writing.

When I began this study, I wondered what a linguist might have to say about metaphor that would be appropriate and interesting to readers of a journal with a name like *Style*. In this context, it quickly became obvious to me that my own ordinary understanding of what was meant by *style* was deficient – deficient enough, anyway, that I decided to perform an act of linguistic research: I looked up *style* in the dictionary.

And thereby I found my topic – or rather my topics, because there are several senses to which I was led, piecemeal and seriatim. Looking at the very first sense of *style* in the *OED* immediately reminded me of a story, which on investigation turned out to be a missing piece of the Conduit Metaphor, pointing to the symbolic nature of writing. Then I noticed that the etymology for *style* was ambivalent, and I investigated **that**, opening an evolutionary path from the prehistory of Indo-European to the present, once again discovering surprising correlations with writing and poetics, and a convergence with metaphor, and with the story I'd just looked at.

In this essay I propose to tell this story and take a stroll along this path, with my readers looking over my shoulder, and I hope enjoying the scenery. At the end I will review some of what was observed and discovered on the journey, discuss the ways the observations and discoveries converge, and point a moral of sorts, about how to equip ourselves on such journeys, and what we should not be surprised to find standing just outside our ordinary field of vision.

- Introduction: How many senses of *style*?

> *Gloucester* Know'st thou the way to Douer?
> *Edgar*   Both style, and gate; Horseway, and foot-path.   – *King Lear*, 4.1[1]

Let us begin by displaying the senses given by the *OED* for the noun *style*. There are 28 of them, grouped into five large classes, of which the first two:

  I. Stylus, pin, stalk. (11 entries)
  II. Writing; manner of writing (hence also of speaking). (7 entries)

were already developed in Latin, and came along when the word *style* (or *stile* – we discuss below the etymological problems that these variants represent) was borrowed into English.

The third sense:

  III. Manner, fashion in general. (8 entries)

is the most general, and therefore common, in modern English, the one most frequently associated with cultural and artistic matters generally.

The final two minor senses have only one entry each, with specialized (though familiar enough) meanings:

  IV. A mode of expressing dates (e.g, **old style**) relative to calendar reform.
  V. Combined, as **style manual**, **style sheet**; **style analysis** – analysis of the characteristic style of an artist, writer, composer, etc.

Of course, these groupings are not definitive, merely convenient; the 28 entries under *style* in the *OED* are numbered sequentially, instead of being subcategorized under *I* through *V*. But they can serve us as signposts, at least, on the path, and occasionally we may pause to look more closely at the fine print on some roadside attraction.

The very first entry for *style* is the most familiar one to the scholar:

> "An instrument made of metal, bone, etc., having one end sharp-pointed for incising letters on a wax tablet, and the other flat and broad for smoothing the tablet and erasing what is written: = *stylus* 1. Also applied to similar instruments in later use."

This is the traditional etymological source of *style* in its literary sense: metonymy from a writing instrument, not unlike the later use of *pen*. But pens, however archaic they may seem in the twenty-first century, have not yet been as many millennia on the path as have styles. The metonymy of using the instrument of writing to refer to the thing written, and thence to the manner of writing or even the character of the writer, was already well

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[1] Epigraphs containing the word *style* are quotations from the *OED* (2nd edition); others are taken from Margaret Magnus's phonosemantic quotations at http://www.conknet.com/~mmagnus/Quotations.html.

established in Late Latin; but the use of wax tablets (and therefore stiles *sensu stricto*) for writing was left behind when *style* arrived in English.

Thus, while *pen* in 'The pen is mightier than the sword' is a transparent metonymy, our normal understanding of *style* is now entirely an abstract one, with its original physical sense known only to the curious and the pedant. What struck me about it, though, was the – literally – pointed relevance of this covert metonymy in the etymology of *style*. It reminded me of a very good story, a story that stands at the origins of writing, and of style, in all its senses, in Western Civilization.

• A Very Good Story

"This is a very serious matter… that the way that human beings think, certainly the way that *I* think, is in terms of stories … Now what is a story? A story, if it so please you, is a metaphor."   – Gregory Bateson

Once upon a time (goes this story), long, long ago, in what we've since come to call Sumeria, there were some people who had herds of animals that they grazed on hills in the summer, and in valleys in the winter, as is still the custom. In the old days these people used to go up in the summers themselves with their herds; but at the time of this story, many of them had begun to find this inconvenient, because agriculture had recently been invented, and they needed to stay in the valleys and take care of their fields.

So they would find somebody else – a son, say, or a nephew, or a cousin, or someone else they knew or trusted – and send them up to take care of the herds in the hills. From our vantage point in the future, we can look at this sagely and mutter about "economic systems" and "division of labor", but at the time of the story, this was getting to be a big problem for a lot of people with herds, because the supply of relatives that weren't needed in the fields (or the wars, or the building projects, or the other activities that were being invented, too) was running out.

And who in their right mind would send their herds – their wealth, their livelihood, their survival – away with some stranger? Even if they came back with the herd, how could you prove that you'd sent them off with 43 goats in the spring when they showed up with only 40 after a summer's grazing? Contrariwise, if you were a potential shepherd, how could you prove that you didn't steal any, in the face of an accusation that you did?

If some authority could be relied on to enforce agreements (in itself, granted, a radical invention, but one that was being developed in parallel with the developments chronicled in this story), then all that was needed was some way to document those agreements; in particular, some way – acceptable to all parties – to count up the goats that were sent off in a way that could be matched against the goats that came back.

This was much the same problem that confronts business today, but it was a new problem then, and they eventually hit on the solution – again, much the same one we use today: they invented Accounting. The simplest, and oldest, solution was simply to count off one bean, or pebble, for each goat and seal them into a container in the spring, then open the container in the fall and match them up again. If goats exceed beans, profit; if beans exceed goats, loss. Either way, one got an account of the summer.

In its mature form, this type of accounting involved clay tokens, of many different shapes, each representing different kinds of commodity, like goats, jars of oil, standard weights of grain, etc. The system spread throughout the Fertile Crescent, and was eventually used widely by governments to detail taxation; these tokens have been found everywhere in great quantities, occasionally in company with unbroken clay balls containing them. The technology at its peak consisted of counting off the tokens into a clay ball, baking the ball, then breaking it when necessary (say, at the end of the summer) to make an accounting.

The hardware had a built-in security feature: if the clay ball was broken, so was the contract. However, there was one bug in the software: suppose one needed to know, in the middle of the summer, exactly how many goats were up in the pastures with the shepherd. One could trust one's memory, but others might not; or one could break the ball and count up the tokens, but then the contract was broken. How to proceed? This was apparently a problem of long standing, since this system lasted for about five millennia, and all its variants had this same defect.

Then someone hit on the device of pressing each token into the outside of the ball **before** putting it in; the resulting bullae could be baked and preserved for contractual purposes, while also displaying images of the contents, suitable for interim counting. Relatively soon after this software upgrade was adopted, however, some genius realized that if the contents of the ball were visible on the outside, the physical tokens on the inside were not actually necessary, and could in fact be dispensed with. All that was really needed was a conventional system of marks on clay, which need not be produced by pressing tokens – and certainly did not require a different individual token for each mark – but could be made with a tool.

Like a stylus. The result, eventually, after more strokes of genius, was what we now call *cuneiform* writing, from the wedge-shaped marks made by the reed stylus that was used.

And they all wrote happily ever after.

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I have presented this account as a story here to avoid being distracted by disagreements about it; scholars are still contending, even as we speak, about details of its veracity[2], but all agree that these tokens existed, that they were used this way for a very long time (from about 8000 to 3000 BCE), and that they disappear from the archeological record at about the time cuneiform was being developed. That's good enough for a story; or a myth, or a metaphor.

One interesting feature of this story is that it is reflexive, a metastory, a story about stories. Counting, and accounting, antedate and prefigure that variety of written accounts that we now call *narrative* – one need only look to the various English senses of *account*, or (say) the fact that *contar* is the Spanish verb both for 'to count' and 'to tell a story'. We will return to the subject of counting later; but the part of this story that I would like to call especially to the reader's attention is the disappearance of the **inside** of that clay ball, and its contents, just at the point where the marks on its **outside**, the ghosts of departed quantities, came to stand, via writing, for the account itself. We turn now to a more modern account of the ins and outs of writing.

• Insides, Outsides, and the Conduit Metaphor

"But do we know how to welcome into our mother tongue the distant echoes that reverberate in the hollow centers of words?   When reading words, we see them and no longer hear them."   – Gaston Bachelard

In 1979 Michael J. Reddy electrified the nascent discipline of cognitive semantics with an essay on what he called "The Conduit Metaphor".[3] In it he provided the first systematic analysis of an important example of what has come to be called a *metaphor theme*, in this case the one underlying most English descriptions of language and communication – English metalanguage. Reading it today, after having followed a quarter-century of the metaphor research it stimulated, is an interesting experience, since it is cast in the form of a story: a story, in fact, with a rather pointed moral. Not to put too fine a point on it, Reddy found the conduit metaphor distasteful, and suggested that our use of it was at the root of a great deal of human misunderstanding. Many after him have had the same reaction,[4] guided, no doubt, by the horrendously bad match between the model proposed by the conduit metaphor and what is known about human communication.

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[2] The token theory is due to Schmandt-Besserat (1992); a representative critique is Michalowski (1993).

[3] Reddy, Michael J. 1979. (2nd Ed. 1994) "The Conduit Metaphor: A Case of Frame Conflict in Our Language About Language". In Andrew Ortony (ed.) *Metaphor and Thought*. Cambridge University Press.

[4] But not all. A recent study by Eubanks (2001) suggests that there is a great deal of benefit to be derived from it in the teaching of composition.

As Reddy puts it, (1979;1994: 290)

"…the four categories which constitute the 'major framework'
of the conduit metaphor … imply, respectively, that:

(1) language functions like a conduit, transferring thoughts
bodily from one person to another;
(2) in writing and speaking, people insert their thoughts
or feelings in the words;
(3) words accomplish the transfer by containing the thoughts
or feelings and conveying them to others; and
(4) in listening or reading, people extract the thoughts and
feelings once again from the words"

Such English expressions referring to speech or writing as *get the idea
across, empty words, full of significance, get something out of it, not much in
it*, and many more, illustrate his point amply.

Following Lakoff and Johnson's (1980)[5] analysis of the conduit meta-
phor, the following three metaphor themes summarize the ontological and
epistemological properties of words, meanings, and communication:

1. Ideas and words are both the same kind of thing; prototypically,
they are physical objects, and thus can both interact physically
and be manipulated.
2. Ideas are contained inside words;
i.e, linguistic entities are containers for meaning(s).
3. Communication consists of physical transmission of meaning-full
words from one party to another, who thereby understands.

While many who have investigated the conduit metaphor after Reddy
have shared his distaste for it, it is not necessary to blame anything on it in
order to realize that it is a remarkably poor model of what actually occurs in
human spoken communication. All three themes above are objectively false
when applied to speech: neither words nor meaning are physical – spoken
words are spatiotemporal events, while meaning is a human interpretive
activity; since they are not physical, neither has either 'inside' or 'outside';
since they are different ontologically, there can be no question of one con-
taining the other in any sense; and neither can there be physical transmission
of meaning-laden strings of words through a physical conduit in spoken
communication.

For writing, on the other hand, the conduit metaphor is not **quite** such
a terrible match. Written words **are**, in fact, physical objects; this is the
source of their permanence, which is the great advantage of writing over

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[5] Lakoff, George and Mark Johnson. 1980. *Metaphors We Live By*. University of Chicago Press.

speech. Further, written communication **is** physical transmission of physical objects. The only mismatch seems to be in the nature of meaning and the role of words as containers for it. But two out of three ain't bad, as metaphors go. Given our culture's long-standing obsession with the written word, it's not too much of a jump to just assume the container metaphor for meaning.

But this turns out to be practically no jump at all. At this point, the missing meaning-full center of those Sumerian bullae becomes significant. Note that if we posit a theoretical 'inside' to a word, containing the *real* meaning that is only signified by the 'outside', we get not only the missing pieces of the conduit metaphor as applied to writing, but also a replication – lodged in the collective unconscious – of the (pre)historical transition from tokenized accounting to cuneiform writing.

Returning to the original topic of *style*, in its original sense of *stile*, we find a splendidly coherent relation between the instrument that marked the outsides (the *stile*, or stylus) thus creating the signification, and the basic semiotic relation between the 'outside' signifier and the 'inside' signified. What we have here, in fact, is a myth – **The** myth, as far as Western writing is concerned. And, as myths do, it points toward ways of relating *style* in its other senses to meaning of all sorts, most especially the very common ones that have to do with the way things look on the outside, culminating most recently, for instance, in the establishment of style.com or The Style Channel.

However, we have only looked at one sense of *style*, its original, and there are many more. The physical sense (roughly, a one-dimensional object, normally oriented vertically, having its ends specialized for contact with a two-dimensional surface) shows up in several technical meanings of *style* in the *OED*, under Category I: six referring to various other small tools for engraving, probing, tracing, and marking, and four in biology, all referring to some sticklike, often sharp, part of a plant or animal. This is unsurprising; technical vocabulary is etymologically conservative, and frequently uses original senses long after they're metaphorized elsewhere.

But this physical sense of *style* is not so easily disposed of. It continues to appear along the path, on various signposts. Consider, for instance, the etymological problem posed by the present English spelling, which uses a 'y' instead of the original Latin 'i'. This might seem trivial to moderns; after all, English spelling changes, and 'y' and 'i' are common variants. But there is a problem. As the *OED* puts it:

 "The spelling *style*, originally a meaningless variant of *stile*, owes its modern currency to the erroneous notion that Lat. *stilus* is an adoption of Grk. στυλος 'column'."

That is, there is a completely different word, borrowed into Latin from Greek (στυλος, transliterated *stulos* or *stylos*), that refers to a different thing from *stilus*, namely '(architectural) column'. The senses of these words, however, are not quite as distinct semantically as they may appear to be etymologically. Columns, though they are much larger than and quite different in function from stiles, resemble them ontologically in that they are both rigid objects of one salient dimension, with their ends distinguished by contact with two-dimensional objects. There is, in addition, a definite sense of vertical orientation to columns; this is easily seen by the contrast of the metaphoric words *column* and *row* to indicate vertical versus horizontal orientation in grids, respectively.

Along the path, it would seem, the Latin, Greek, and English sounds represented by 'i' and 'y' became indistinguishable, with the results:

1. that the two words *stilus* and *stylus,* and their various senses, merged long ago in speakers' minds, even in Roman times, and
2. that, ever since, efforts to keep them apart have not stood up, etymologically speaking, despite lexicographic whingeing about 'erroneous notions'.

● *stā-* and Its Ilk

"As we go back in history, language becomes more picturesque.... if we could trace them
 to their sources, we should find in all languages, the names which stand for things."   – Emerson, *Nature*

Is it by accident that we come upon these two words with similar meanings that sound alike? One is always suspicious when this happens; after two centuries of Indo-European studies, we are familiar with far too many cases where a Proto-Indo-European root produces such doublets. The letter upsilon ('Y') in Greek originally represented a high back rounded [u] in Homeric times; this vowel was fronted to high front rounded [ü] by Classical times, when it was borrowed into Latin (and thus required a special letter 'Y' to represent this unLatin sound); then it lost its rounding, to become indistinguishable from Latin high front unrounded 'I' [i]. This front-back distinction looks very much like the same kind of ablaut variation one finds between say, Greek ποδος (*podos*, with mid <u>back</u> rounded [o]; English cognate *podiatrist*) and Latin *pedis* (with mid <u>front</u> <u>un</u>rounded [e]; cognate *pedestrian*), both meaning 'foot', and both coming from the PIE root ***ped-***. Is there such a single root for *stile* and *style*? If so, it would be a very convenient explanation for both the phonological and the semantic similarities.

Reversing our course on the path to see where it starts from, we find from Watkins (2000) and Pokorny (1959) that there is **not**, in fact, a single root involved. On the contrary, apparently the Greek στυλος comes from the PIE root ***stā-*** 'to stand', while the Latin *stilus* comes from ***steigh-*** 'to

stride, step, rise'. We now find ourselves left with the same question, only more so, since, while Indo-Europeanists may consider these two roots separate, not only do **steigh-* and **stā-* resemble one another in their phonological shape, but their senses, 'stand' and 'step', are also undoubtedly similar ontologically. Is **this**, then, an accident?

Alas, we have now gone as far as the Comparative Method will take us in exploring the origins of the path. The sources and remote affiliations of PIE roots themselves remain a hopelessly controversial affair, from which we can expect no authoritative direction in which to continue investigating the path. However, we **can** certainly investigate that cluster of roots standing around at the beginning of the pavement. It turns out there are quite a lot of reconstructed PIE roots that begin with *st-*. Of these, most display the same set of related meanings as **sta-* and **steigh-*. Figure 1 shows the major roots in this class.

o **stā-*	'To stand, with derivatives meaning "place or thing that is standing"' (Pok *sta-* 1004) *style, stand, steed, stud, stay, stage, stamen, standard, stem, station, stasis, static, status, stable, stoic, store, stylite, steer*
o **steigh-*	'To stride, step, rise' (Pok *steigh-* 1017) *stile, stirrup, stickle, distich, acrostic*
o **steu-*	'To push, stick, knock, beat' (Pok 2. *steu-* 1025) *stub, steeple, stoop, stutter, stock, stoke, steep*
o **stel-*	'To put, stand; with derivatives referring to a standing object or place' (Pok 3. *stel-* 1019) *stolon, stalk, stele, stilt, pedestal, stolid, stall, stout*
o **ster-*	'Stiff' (Pok 5. *ster-* 1029) *stare, starch, stork, starve, stark, stern, strut, start, stark, startle*
o **stebh-*	'Post, stem; to support, place firmly on, fasten' (Pok *steb(h)-* 1011) *stoop, staff, staple, stump, stamp, stomp, stave*
o **steip-*	'To stick, compress' (Pok *steib(h)-* 1015) *stubble, stiff, stipple*
o **steg-*	'Pole, stick' (Pok 2. *(s)teg-* 1014) *stake, stack, stagger*
o **stegh-*	'To stick, prick; pointed' (Pok *stegh-* 1014) *stair, stick, sting, stigma, stimulate, stag*

Figure 1. *st*-initial PIE roots, with some reflexes in Modern English
Source: Watkins (2000), Pokorny (1959)

There is a strong family resemblance among the roots here. Indeed, on perusing this list, one finds a persistent cognitive image building up, with at least the following four significant perceptual properties:

> 1. *One-Dimensional:*
>   The image has only one salient major dimension
> 2. *Vertical:*
>   That dimension is situated in an up-and-down orientation
> 3. *Strong:*
>   The image displays rigidity, stability, and physical integrity
> 4. *Still:*
>   The image is either unmoving, or frozen in motion

Figure 2. Cognitive semantic properties of *st*-initial PIE roots

Remarkably, not only does this image stand for the meaning of these roots, but it still stands for the meanings of their descendants in Modern English, after at least 5 millennia of language change. In particular, it fits beautifully into the Modern English phonosemantic assonance-rime classifier system.

- *stick, staff, stem*, etc.

  "Since in human speech, different sounds have different meaning, to study
  the coordination of certain sounds with certain meanings is to study language."   – Leonard Bloomfield

Classifier systems are familiar to speakers of many languages, where they are required when counting nouns with numerals or marking agreement. Classifiers are special words or morphemes that identify nouns as members of particular semantic classes, like human or animal; for instance, Malay (Indonesian), which has a simple system, uses only three classifiers: *orang* 'person' for humans, *ekor* 'tail' for animals, and *buah* 'fruit' for everything else countable. In Malay, one must say:

> *tiga orang bapak*   'three fathers'
> *tiga ekor ikan*   'three fish'
> *tiga buah buku*   'three books'

One cannot say simply **tiga bapak, *tiga ikan,* or **tiga buku*. One must use classifiers with any counted noun.

However, it is possible to get much more complex than this; systems with 20 or more classifiers are common, and systems with as many as 56 classifiers – and semantic classes to match – are known. Other sorts of classifier systems occur in some languages like Yucatec Mayan, where they are used not only to count nouns, but also to inflect verbs as to the ontological category of nouns in construction with the verbs. In all these

systems, although there is massive diversity in both the form and the function of classifiers, there is a great deal of consistency and similarity in the **kinds** of categories used to classify, even among geographically separated, typologically different, and historically unrelated languages.[6]

It is always the case, for instance, that living things are to be distinguished from non-living, and humans from non-humans. The Malay system does only this, but larger systems make many more distinctions, prototypically including

- Dimension
    - 1-dimensional things like sticks or pencils
    - 2-dimensional things like leaves or sheets of paper
    - 3-dimensional things like stones or holes
- Material state
    - solid or rigid things like sticks or rocks
    - flexible or non-rigid things like leaves or straps
    - fluid things like water or air
    - extended things like plains or trails

Until very recently, classifiers, though common enough in world languages, were unknown in English, at least to linguists. However, it has been discovered (by the present author and others[7]) that there is a widespread and very ancient phenomenon in English that functions, in effect, like a classifier system, though of a type different from both the Malay counting system and the Mayan verb-inflection system.

The system is a puzzling one that flies in the face of orthodox linguistic wisdom, which holds that there is no systematic semiotic relation between the sound of a word and its meaning,[8] as in Saussure's famous principle of *l'arbitraire du signe*. On the contrary, however, we have found that there is a great deal of semantic and ontological coherence between the senses of many English words (prototypically monosyllabic words), on the one hand, and the **assonances** (initial consonant clusters) and **rimes** (nucleus vowel plus coda compounds) that one finds in them, on the other.

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[6] See Adams and Conklin (1973) and Allan (1977) for more details. The title of Lakoff (1987) – W*omen, Fire, and Dangerous Things* – refers to a cultural semantic class of referents that take a particular classifier in an Australian language..

[7] See Rhodes and Lawler (1981), McCune (1983), Lawler (1990), Rhodes (1994), Hoover (2000), Lawler (2000), and the online Simplex Words Database.

[8] Except for onomatopoeia, which is a special case and comparatively rare.

This phenomenon goes by various names[9], but we will refer to it here as **phonosemantics**.[10] Some examples are listed in Figures 3 and 4.

st-	1-Dimensional Rigid	*stick staff stem stub stab step stake stave stiff stilt steep*
str-	1-Dimensional Non-Rigid	*strap string strum strain strip streak stream straw*
pr-	1-Dimensional Extended	*prick prod prop prow pretzel privet prong probe*
kr-	1-Dimensional Bent	*crutch cripple crack crotch cross crank crimp crevice*
br-	1-Dimensional Connected	*brush break bridge brim briar browse branch*
fl-	2-Dimensional	*float flat flap flense fletch flood flam flange flea fleece floe*
sk-	2-Dimensional Extended	*sky scum scuff scarf scour scale skate skid skim skip*
pl-	2-Dimensional Thick	*plush plump plaque plaster plank plate plow pleat*
n-	3-Dimensional	*nick niche nook nub nugget knuckle knurl knob nipple*
br-	Human (Gender Roles)	*M: brute brawl bruise bris F: breed broad breast bread*
pr-	Human (Social Roles)	*proper prim priest prom prissy primp proud pray preen*
kl-	Connection ('together')	*club clutch clam clamp clap cluster clench click cling*
bl-	Color (Reflected Light)	*blue blood blush black blank blotch blaze blind blond*
bl-	Contained Fluid	*blimp blush bloom blot blain blintz blood blow bloat*
dr-	Liquid	*dredge drink drop drown drought dry drain dribble drizzle drool*

Figure 3. Some English phonosemantic assonance classes

Of the two systems, assonances are by far the more coherent. For those assonances that display phonosemantic coherence[11], the coherence rate is on the order of 70%; that is, if a given assonance is associated with some meanings, around 70% of the English simplex words beginning with that assonance will show the meanings. This is significant in two ways: first, it indicates that these assonances are not ordinary morphemes, since 100% of the occurrences of a morpheme have its meaning. Second, it is clear that chance alone cannot possibly account for semantic coherence to this extent. Of the assonances in the Lawler-Rhodes Simplex Noun Database, most are coherent.

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[9] The first reference to it was by Firth (1935), who called the assonances *phon(a)esthemes*; Bolinger (1950) originated the use of the terms *rime* and *assonance* in this context.

[10] There are other phonosemantic traditions besides rime-assonance analysis. The most thoroughgoing and well-grounded is due to Magnus (1998, 1999, 2001).

[11] There are assonances that do not display coherence; *fr-* for example, seems to be devoid of significance, though *fl-* is a 2-dimensional classifier.

Rimes, on the other hand, possibly because there are far more of them (480)[12] than assonances (67), only rarely approach the coherence levels of assonances, and have a much broader range of variation. A recent study (Lawler 2000) of the 96 rimes with more than 20 occurrences in English (which account for about 54% of English simplex words) showed that, though some, like **-əmp**, **-əŋk**, **-əb**, **-ɪŋk**, **-ɪp**, **-ɔl**, **-ap**, **-æg**, and **-æʃ**, are around 70% coherent, most are much lower (around 47% on average for rimes displaying coherence), and many are not coherent at all, yielding an overall coherence rate of only 30% (including 37 non-coherent rimes).

-ɪŋk	Diminutive	*slink trinket tinker dinky* (Aural: *chink dink plink*)
-ɪp	Diminutive	*kipper sip yip quip* (Convex: *pip blip clip trip*)
-æŋ	1-Dimensional Connected	*hang angle dangle tangle*
-ɔl	2-Dimensional	*shawl sprawl scrawl wall* (Motion: *crawl brawl squall haul fall*)
-æp	2-Dimensional	*flap clap lap map wrap slap strap cap chap*
-æk	2-Dimensional Connected	*plaque stack bracket tacky ash*
-ap	Off 2-Dimensional	*bop top hop pop flop* (Separate: *drop topple lop crop*)
-əmp	3-Dimensional	*rump hump lump stump bump tump dump plump*
-æg	Crooked/Broken	*snag zag crag sag rag*
-æʃ	Violent Contact	*bash trash crash thrash slash gash*
-ɪŋ	Directed Force	*sling sting spring ring ping swing bring*

Figure 4. Some English phonosemantic rime classes

Many words combine the senses of their rimes with their assonances in some manner: to *sting*, for instance, is to direct force (-ɪŋ) with a 1-dimensional rigid (indeed, pointed) object (st-). Even seemingly contradictory senses like contrast of dimensions can be coordinated: to be *plump* is to be 3-dimensional (-əmp), with a thick 2-dimensional surface (pl-); a *strap* is mostly long and flexible, but also wide – i.e, it is a 1-dimensional non-rigid object (str-) with a less salient extension in a second dimension (-æp); finally, a *stump* is a 3-dimensional object (-əmp) that **used to be** a 1-dimensional rigid object (st-). While not all monosyllables are as strikingly decomposable as these, the phenomenon is very widespread.

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[12] Since syllable nuclei (vowels) and codas (final clusters) vary independently, the number of possible rimes is a cross-product. For the same reason, most rimes occur in only a few words.

Phonosemantically coherent words may be old or new; Old English vocabulary displays much the same sets of categories with much the same sets of assonances, and as we have seen, the *st-* assonance class has been around at least 5,000 years, since Indo-European, or even before.

Since the origins of poetry, in fact – this kind of phonosemantic coherence is one of the important semiotic facts that make poetry possible in the first place. (Parenthetically, the fact that English assonances are much more coherent than rimes is completely consistent with the fact that Old English poetry displays much more initial cluster repetition than it does rhyming. This amounts, simply, to an effective use of semiotic resources. Even in modern English, where rhymed poetry is not uncommon, poets frequently resort to assonances as well as rimes to make their poems sound right. Indeed, many poets – Emily Dickinson comes to mind– are notable for their mastery of this phenomenon.)

But I digress; we were speaking of *style*. We see that the English **st-** assonance is tagged as a 1-Dimensional Rigid classifier. That is to say, it has three of the four characteristics given in Figure 2 for PIE st- roots, lacking only a necessary vertical orientation (though that is a common enough subclass of 1-D Rigid). This is entirely coherent with the ontological senses of both *stile* **and** *style*, and indicates why they are so easy to conflate, etymology to the contrary.

Not all of the characteristics in Figure 2 will be true of every Modern English word that comes from the roots in Figure 1, but some combination of the features applies to them all. For instance, although the Modern English words *stamen, stile, steeple, stalk, stork, staff, stake,* and *stick* each come from a different PIE root, all of them refer either to long rigid objects or to things characterized by such, mostly vertically oriented, and often supporting, attached, or applied to other structures by their ends. For that matter, they tend to apply to any Modern English word beginning with *st-*, no matter where it comes from.

It is **very** difficult to believe that this, too, is a coincidence. Every time we investigate one seeming coincidence involving this word, we find one that is much larger and comprehensive, and correspondingly harder to account for. Luckily, we are not required to stretch our credulity muscles beyond natural bounds. The notions of ***radial classes*** and ***embodied image schema***, as developed in cognitive linguistics, apply very nicely to this kind of data, and allow us to step off the path and see things from a rather different standpoint.

• The Standing Man

"It is most true, *stylus virum arguit*, our stile bewrayes vs."   – Burton, *Anatomy of Melancholy*
"As a king is styled, when most affectionately praised, the father of his people."   – Wordsworth, *Excursion*
"Going to Caesar's books, and concluding that the style is the man."   – Shaw, *Caesar & Cleopatra*

Lakoff (1987)[13] is responsible for the term "embodied image", which is used to remind us of the linked concepts that:

- images (not only, or all, visual images) are the result of humans' actual experience of their sensory percepts and action programs

- image schemas are the principal components of metaphor

- metaphor is a (if not **The**) principal method of human thought

- none of this is abstract,
  but is rather a physical part of the physical human body

An embodied image[14] is one that presupposes a human being to perceive it; one that has meaning only in the context of a physical human body. In Lakoff's view, this includes practically all of human thought, though we need not accept this position to see the power and utility of the concept. One particularly obvious and potent variety of embodied image is one of a human being, or of a human body part.

For instance, it has recently been discovered (Dehaene et al 1999) that the human activity of **counting**, on which all of mathematics is based, both historically and theoretically, and which, as we have seen, formed the basis for the Western invention of writing, is mediated by the parietal lobes and the intraparietal sulci, areas of the human brain that control the motor activities of the **hands**. In effect, counting is a projection of manual activity, even in its most abstract mathematical sense.[15] This is undoubtedly a result of evolution, and the image schemas involved in counting and mathematics are embodied in the sense that they crucially involve possession and use of neurological structures that coevolved with human hands.

Such image schemas often serve as a central focus for *radial classes*, semantic groupings in which a number of words or concepts are grouped together along a number of semantic dimensions, usually without an obvious

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[13] See also Johnson (1987), Lakoff & Turner (1989), Lakoff & Johnson (1999), and Lakoff & Núñez. (2000)

[14] For our purposes, the difference between *image* and *image schema* can be profitably ignored, and I will use them interchangeably here. Technically, an image schema is more complex, but the usages are not consistently distinguished in the cognitive literature, and either term can refer to the kind of complex concepts common in literary uses of the term *image*.

[15] Lakoff and Núñez (1997) and Lawler and Breck (1998) made the same claim, independently, on grounds of cognitive metaphor.

semantic core in common. Metaphor themes are frequently radial classes, and embodied images are also common in phonosemantic classes.

The '1-Dimensional Connected' sense of *br-*, for instance, manifests itself in such **Plant** images as *briar, bristle, brush,* and *branch*, interpreted from the point of view of (usually painful) contact between the plant and a human. There is a significant overlap between these images and the Human Gender Role senses of *br-*; words with the Male sense of *br-* are largely about territorial defense and aggressive display, and *bristle* and *brush* both have senses of this sort which are coherent with their Plant images.

For another example, the two rather disparate senses of the *bl-* assonance, Contained (or Compressed) Fluid, and Color (Reflected Light) can be united in a radial class focussed on the embodied image of the **Eye**. Note that the eye is the only reflective part of the human body, that it is both colored itself and perceives color, and that it is a distended, fluid-filled organ.

I suggest that the various senses of *st-*, including those of *style*, stretching along the path from PIE to Modern English, form a radial class with the single embodied image of a **Standing Man**.

The ***Standing*** part refers to the vertical orientation of the waking human body, clearly a significant image for all humans since the origin of our species. The salient parts of the image are precisely those of Figure 2: 1-Dimensional, Vertical, Strong, and Still.   By quite ordinary lexical extensions, we get many images that are metaphoric projections of the Standing Man: *structures* and *constructions* and their parts, physical objects like *sticks* and *stems* and *staffs*, qualities like *stiff* and *still* and *stolid*, and all the other images (and their modern reflexes) that appear in Figure 1.

As for the ***Man*** part, English, alas, does not allow one to distinguish easily between *man* in the sense of 'human being' and *man* in the sense of 'masculine human', but I chose the word precisely because of this ambiguity. Given the 1-dimensional rigid nature of so many *st-* words, it is impossible to ignore the phallic parts of the image, and of both *stile* and *style* (though I have tried). This image just won't go away; one trips over it again in the story of origins of writing itself – those deltas in the clay at the end of the long thin stylus are just a little too suggestive. What repercussions these images may have for narratology, cultural studies, gay theory, or biopoetics I leave to specialists in those disciplines, but it seems clear enough that embodiment casts a long shadow.

The image also echoes in the meanings of *style* as they stand in the *OED*, which points out that *The style is the man* was an old proverb even in Latin, and adds that *to style* is to name a person; that a king's *style* is his full set of titles; and that how one *styles oneself* onomastically can often be significant, as significant as one's *personal style*, or *sense of style*, in the modern American sense, which has to do rather intensively with clothing, i.e, outsides.

• Conclusion: Ontology Recapitulates Physiology

"The idea that there is any mental process going on that *isn't* metaphoric is a very late, school-marmish idea. What they were killing each other over in the 17th Century was metaphor. Is the bread and wine the body and blood of Christ? The Catholics said yes. The Protestants said no; it *stands* for body and blood. The Protestant view of the sacrament was a policy decision to exclude from the Church that part of the mind which is concerned with poetry, feeling, fantasy, metaphor, stories."   – Gregory Bateson

We have now traversed the whole path, though we're not quite through with the word or phenomenon of **style**. I note that as the word is used in ordinary American English it is mostly concerned with clothing – in terms of consumerism, status and sexual display, fad, fashion, and popular esthetic. There is also a slightly more rarefied and intellectual usage in which *style* has to do with artistic creation and individual mannerisms, frequently in a context of esthetic judgement.

In general, Style is conceived in Sacramental terms – i.e, one's style, in clothing or in writing, is held to be an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace. Both these related senses have a great deal to do with perceived or posited 'insides' and 'outsides'. It is, of course, the mind, or the personality, or the nature, or the spirit, or the soul, or the artistic sensibility, or some other intangible property of an individual human that is held to be the 'inside' in such a relation; since it is abstract and non-physical, we can only infer its qualities from what's on its 'outside'. And what is its 'outside'? In fashion terms, it's the stylishly clothed human body; in literary or artistic terms, it's the stylized body of work. In both cases, one needs a body to inspect, an inner 'reality' to interpret from it, and an esthetic or ethical sense to judge it by. Thus, **style**.

What I suggest here is no more than Protagoras's dictum – Παντων μετρον ανθρωπος 'Man is the measure of all things'[16] – that the null hypothesis for **all** meaning, ontological or epistemological, esthetic or ethical, is that it is in one way or another a projection of the human body, in the sense of metaphoric extension of our body parts, our sensory percepts, and our

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[16] See Turner (1994) for a provocative discussion of this issue in cognitive semantics.

neuromuscular action programs. This is hardly a novel perspective in the humanities,[17] but it is in practice uncommon in philosophy or the sciences, including linguistics. This is changing, and we may confidently expect more changes to occur, though it is not so clear what they will be, nor how they will affect us.

In *Nature*, Emerson famously declaimed that 'the whole of nature is a metaphor of the human mind'. But this is only the first line of a syllogism; the second line would be that the human mind is a metaphor of the human body. Metaphor being transitive, the conclusion follows that the whole of nature **as we perceive it** must be related cognitively to the human body **first**, before any other understanding is possible at all.

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[17]   See Doherty (2001) or Punday (2000) for recent instances of its use in literary discourse.

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