

## GRAY MATTER 032004

gray matter: 1. the grayish nerve tissue in the brain and spinal cord that contains nerve cells and some nerve fibers. 2. (Informal, Figurative.) intelligence; brains. 3. (my) term used to identify a particular fabricated object(s) , given because of its visual resemblance to brains, and the cognitive processes of interpretation that the object (gray matter) refers to

gray: 8. indeterminate in character

matter: 1. the substance or substances of which any physical object consists or is composed ... 3. something that occupies space ... 11. the material or substance of a discourse

for your consideration ... gray matter ... the object at the intersection of ontology, epistemology, and semiotics ...

one scenario: an encounter with the object might present the viewer with bewilderment because of its ambiguity ... it is not a common object ... it is unfamiliar, yet it is composed of familiar material ... it is unlike other objects normally encountered in ones daily routine ... identification of the object is not readily accessible from the inventory of known objects ... many a viewer might quickly conclude that the object is too oblique, and dismiss it ... the object has no value ... the object is abject ... this viewer might think; "it is not worth my time to consider it any further" ... the encounter with the object is over and can be quickly filed away with other similar ephemeral experiences ... next ...

another scenario: another viewer might encounter the object and have a

different experience ... this viewer's experience would probably begin the same way, noting the object's unfamiliarity, yet this viewer might give the object more consideration ... the object becomes the subject of inquiry ... after a while this viewer might draw conclusions about the object ... these conclusions might modify previous experiences with other objects (and/or events) ... this viewer makes amendments to previous experiences, then files them away ... next ...

so, the point is that the object, the same object, encountered by multiple viewers will be processed differently, and various conclusions will be drawn ... what are these processes, and how do they happen? ... gray matter presents itself as an ambiguous ontology and challenges the viewer to interpret it ... in order for interpretation to take place the viewer must first acknowledge the existence of the object, then access one's own gray matter to establish a set of terms that will enable the viewer to read the object ...

i suggest these three sets of terms as the primary concepts involved with an encounter with the object ...

ontology: the study of what there is, an inventory of what exists. an ontological commitment is a commitment to an existence claim.

epistemology: philosophy concerned with theories of knowledge -- i.e., what knowledge is, how it is obtained, how reliable it is, and so on.

semiotics: the study of signs and symbols as language; the analysis of systems of communication

first is the physical encounter with the object ... the object comes into view,

and a relationship begins between one's self and the object ... its presence is acknowledged ... it is confirmed to be a real substance occupying space, and is in proximity to the space one occupies ... one might consider one's proximity to the object and navigate one's way around it ... one might decide to touch the object to further confirm its existence ... the other senses might simultaneously be acknowledging characteristics of the object ... it is put into context with its surrounding objects and the landscape, which signals the next set of considerations ... up to this point a relationship with the object has engaged ontological considerations ...

next epistemological considerations will occur ... the object is analyzed via cognitive processes in an attempt to identify the object ... surface features are read for visual information ... recognizable information ... its surface appears to be gray fur ... animals have fur, but its not shaped like an animal and it doesn't appear to be alive ... it's sewn together with black thread ... living gray furry animals don't have stitching, so it appears to be a manufactured object ... even though it is obviously a manufactured object it doesn't appear to be a mass produced consumer product ... its form is somewhat organic and vermicular ... touch it and it feels soft as one would expect fur to feel ... its soft surface gives way to pressure ... it feels spongy and soft like a pillow, although some of its interior feels hard and varied in shape, indicating that there might be an assortment of other objects inside ... pick it up, or move it and it's flexible, indicating that it doesn't have a rigid internal structure ... its form is not stable or singular, as it could be rearranged ... if it were further explored by picking it up, and moving it, it would be discovered that it is not just one object, but it is a pile of objects ... if the pile were pulled apart and separated, it would be discovered that it is numerous objects, all similar but no two exactly alike ... these components are all ten feet long tubular forms and vary in diameter between

three inches and twenty four inches ... each one looks like a large fuzzy worm ... so far, an empirical investigation of the object has lead to identifying the exterior materials and the components form, but its interior is still unknown ... also, still unknown is its purpose ... its function is indiscernible ... complete [re]cognition of the object is still lacking ...

this analysis of the object has been an ontological and epistemological investigation, implemented by a semiotic reading of the object... all of the sensory details are signs to be read and translated in the process of inquiry ... the ontological features of the object are a language to be decoded ... the aggregate of the object can be described as a signifier whose code is unknown, and presents itself to be decoded ... the logical extension of this claim would imply that the object is a message vehicle, and is part of a relationship between a sender and receiver ... the viewer of the object is the recipient of the message, whose content is unknown primarily because the code of the message is unfamiliar ... this, of course, puts the viewer in the position of asking; "what does it mean? ' ... at best the viewer formulates a conjectural explanation, and the object means whatever the viewer thinks it means (including nothing) ... this interpretation of the message may or may not be the message intended by the sender ... so, is it an effective message or not? (as outlined in the scenario at the beginning of this essay) ... then it might be postulated that the amount and content of meaning is dependent on the epistemological information that the viewer possesses prior to an encounter with the object ... even so, it seems that the relationship that the fabricator of the object has with the object will not be the same as the relationship the viewer has ... or paraphrased as; the sender of the message creates the code of the message which will be unknown by the receiver, so the receiver will not understand the content of the

message ... even if the receiver decodes the message (s)he may not understand its content to the extent that the sender/fabricator does ... is this a problem, or not? ... the answer to that question could lead to a lengthy discourse that could fill volumes ... in short there is no guarantee that any sign will have meaning that will be agreed upon by any number of individuals ... text itself can be difficult enough to understand, so an object like gray matter may impossible to interpret ...

i am the fabricator of the object that i refer to as gray matter ... the experience that i have in the process of fabricating means something to me ... i consider it to be a therapeutic activity ... meaning; a pedagogish therapy performed by research consumption and an interpretive production/ documentation of research results ... the fabrication process of gray matter is very simple ... i take gray artificial fur fabric and somewhat arbitrarily cut it into shapes, and sew it together with black thread ... the only cuts that aren't arbitrary are the beginning pieces; two 10" by 60" pieces, that are sewn together to form a 10' long tube, and the end pieces are 3" diameter circles ... technically even these cuts are approximate (except for the 60", because that is the width of the roll of fabric) ... so, i sew pieces into this ten foot tube until i arbitrarily decide to stop ... then i fill it with junk, sew it closed, and throw it onto the pile ... i intentionally make these decisions random because i don't want to get bogged down into technical craftsmanship ... the object is not the manifestation of an aesthetic of advanced craftsmanship, its the manifestation of a raw ontology/presence, and an economical and unaffected fabrication process is sufficiently appropriate craftsmanship ... its similar to the reason that i inappropriately use ellipsis in this text ... i don't want to get bogged down with grammatical rules, i just want to focus on getting my thoughts into print ...

the fabrication process for the gray matter project is the same process as for the endless suture project ... the only differences are that the endless suture project is made with fluorescent yellow fur fabric, and the interior is filled with my own personal excess junk ... gray matter's interior is filled with my recently deceased mother's belongings ... the conceptual themes of the two projects entertains different (yet similar and linked) ideas ... i think of endless suture as being about desire and consumption/production, and gray matter as being about memory and mental processes ... both are about a relationship with the world of objects ... i think of both as being open ended works, so these associations aren't exclusive ...

i call myself a junk processor because that is what i do when i fabricate these objects ... i take junk/objects and process it into [an]other junk/objects ... i transform junk/objects from one state into [an]other state ... i move it from a visible/known presence to an invisible/unknown presence ... it moves from presence to absence ... out of sight (concealed beneath the furry fabric) , the objects once present are now memories ... i consider this fabrication process to be like simulating the process of experience ... its like acting out the process of consciousness ... moving and processing information from in front of the eyes to behind the eyes ... transforming "reality" into the content of gray matter ... processing one "reality" into [an] other "reality" ...

by the terms of semiotics, a sign stands in for what is absent ... so, with that claim in mind i can construct further meaning for gray matter ... this meaning came about serendipitously ... after working on the endless suture project for a few years, i planed to begin the gray matter project as an conceptual extension of the endless suture project ... as chance would have it, i was beginning the project right after my mother's death ... when

someone dies, the closest survivors are forced to deal with the task of disposing of the deceased personal belongings ... that task can present a problem ... for me the solution was obvious ... here are the materials for gray matter ... what more appropriate materials could there be for a composition about memory than this? ... the memory of a parent would be one of the earliest and most deeply rooted memories one could have ... so, similarly, as outlined in the previous paragraph, when i am unpacking the boxes of my mothers belongings and stuffing them into the furry forms, i am simulating the process of remembering my mother ... what was once a living presence in front of my eyes, is now a memory, present behind the eyes, in my gray matter ... the objects, that were her possessions, are the physical evidence of her existence ... in particular, her clothes ... i can bury my face in an article of her clothing, and i can smell my mother ... her memory comes rushing back through sensory experience with an inanimate object ... this seems to profoundly demonstrate what i mean by a relationship with the world of objects ... this piece of manufactured fabric, purchased and owned by my mother, now in my possession, can connect me with her memory ... it's presence replaces her absence ... its a physical experience triggering a metaphysical experience ...

this experience that i have in the fabrication process of gray matter is a subjective experience that any viewer of the object (gray matter) can never experience ... this might be testimony to the impossibility of the meaning of gray matter as a narrative message ever being fully interpreted by it's receiver ... even with the knowledge of my experience, the sensation of the experience is impossible to be known by any recipient of the message, to the extent that the i know this meaning ... the viewer of gray matter would never even know of this constructed meaning without the aid of this text ... so, gray matter as a message vehicle will be lacking in an ability to

communicate the complete story ... at best, the viewer, with the knowledge of this detailed information, can only imagine what that experience would be like ... that detailed information isn't the point anyway (but i think it is worth mentioning, because it is an example of how meaning is constructed subjectively) ... the point is that we have relationships with objects (either conscious or unconscious), and that the object is a link to some order of epistemological knowledge that informs the object ... the signification of the object will be constructed based on some subjective bias ... this epistemological knowledge is the content of one's gray matter, and can also be described as memory ... when confronted with the unfamiliar, the mind will compare the unfamiliar experience against remembered experiences in an attempt to make it familiar ... anyway, this is, of course, about subjectivity/objectivity, and the object (gray matter), if nothing else, is a sign that will be experienced and interpreted subjectively, especially if it is encountered without the aid of this text ...

another signification that i have constructed for gray matter is an association with worms ... sometimes i refer to these objects as junk worms ... another version of the project is the dream worm project ... the dream worms are similar looking objects, but are black fur with "eyes" ... the "eyes" are transparent plastic patches randomly sewn into the fur, permitting views to the interior ... the project is intended to refer to freud's: the interpretation of dreams ... the dream worms could be described as [re]presenting the dream process as a black worm with "eyes" ... the black worm stands in for a model of the subconscious, and the "eyes" are the access into the subconscious during dreaming ... an extension of that model is imagined as ideas (or thoughts) taking on the form of worms, and squirming around inside the mind, transversing between the conscious and the subconscious mind ...



yet another interpretation of gray matter might be that the individual components of the whole could be envisioned as three dimensional models of a mark ... a mark defined as the primary root of any text ... this text is made up of marks ... the mark, out of context with other marks and/or its signifying system, is meaningless in itself ... the raw mark at best is only evidence of one's existence ... the mark organized and put together with other marks can form language ... language forms a narrative, and a narrative forms a fiction, and a fiction forms a discourse ... so, gray matter could be interpreted as an indeterminate message, waiting to be organized and contextualized into a meaningful discourse ... it is the code disrupted and made unfamiliar, reduced to a mess of marks, and challenges its interpreter to encode it with meaning ...

conclusion (?): so, this so-called therapeutic activity that i engage in can be described as a process of constructing meaning from the world of complex signs ... it is a way for me to meditate and mediate on complicated ideas ... the product of this activity is like the residue of the process ... gray matter may not be a necessary product of this process, but it can function as a link to my investigation ... it can be the link between two human terminals, and a link that is indexical to the discursive phantasmagoria ... that discourse is what's really worth considering about the project, as it is insightful to the intricate mechanisms that inform our perception of life ... i have asked myself before; why should my therapy be of interest to anyone else? ... and there is no reason why anyone should be subjugated to it ... except, that my therapy is not intended to be about me ... yes, it is about my relationship with the world of objects, but this relationship, this experience that i refer to isn't exclusively mine, it is ours ... so, gray matter (the object and the text) is an invitation for you to consider how i am attempting to understand our

experience ... and who am i? ... i am to you as you are to me ... i am just [an]  
other self ...