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## **Peirce and image 1**

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# Peirce and image 1

*working papers\**

## Peirce's Esthetics: A Taste For Signs in Art<sup>1</sup>

What is man's proper function if it be not to  
embody general ideas in art-creations, in utilities,  
and above all in theoretical cognitions?

- C. S. Peirce<sup>2</sup> (*EP* 2, p. 443)

Can Peirce's conception of the esthetic contribute anything to the theory or the philosophy of art — what is usually referred to today as *aesthetics*?<sup>3</sup> The question opens up a perspective from which I have sought to examine some of Peirce's later writings where he explains his conceptions of both the normative sciences and his pragmatism. At the outset we shall see how much Peirce's commitment to esthetics as the science of the "admirable in itself" departs from the more common view of esthetics as the philosophy of art. Yet, Peirce's many hesitations whenever he ventured to discuss esthetics may be seen to illustrate some of the difficulties he wrestled with in trying to distinguish his conception of this science from the idea that it should primarily be concerned with art and the beautiful. What is more, there is no evidence to be had that Peirce ever arrived at a definitive statement on the matter nor even that he had settled it to his own satisfaction. But the absence of any such truly comprehensive or final account that would clarify once and for all the place occupied by art or by the esthetic experience of art within Peirce's conception of esthetics in

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no way implies that there is nothing to be gained by giving the issue careful consideration. The following is an attempt to do just that.

In the first section, I go over the main points of Peirce's esthetics and consider its role as a "normative science" within his mature classification of the sciences. In the second section, I offer some hypotheses as to what conception of art and of aesthetic experience one may legitimately draw from Peirce's approach to esthetics.

### **Esthetics and normative science**

To avoid any misunderstandings, it is important from the start to point out that what Peirce meant by "esthetics" differs greatly from that which the modern tradition has identified as the part of philosophy which concerns itself, as Hegel put it in the introduction of his *Aesthetics*, with "the realm of the beautiful; and more precisely [...] art, or rather, *fine art*."<sup>4</sup> Indeed, while art eventually became the paradigmatic domain of esthetics, especially in the post-Kantian period, the Peircean conception of this science seems at first glance to be somewhat indifferent to it. In fact, Peirce even appears at times contemptuous of esthetics so understood, as can be seen in a manuscript of 1911 where he writes that "instead of a silly science of Esthetics, that tries to bring us enjoyment of sensuous beauty, — by which I mean all beauty that appeals to our five senses, — that which ought to be fostered is meditation, ponderings, day-dreams (under due control), concerning ideals" (*EP* 2, p. 460). Earlier, in his "Minute Logic" of 1902 he had stated that esthetics has been "handicapped by the definition of it as the theory of beauty" (2.199) and that logicians ought to avoid the German way of calling upon sensibility and feelings to judge the value of reasoning, of looking "upon the natural judgment of rationality as a mere judgment of feeling" (*CP* 2.165).

Only late in his life did Peirce ever come to offer esthetics an important role within his philosophical system as a normative science, alongside ethics and logic. No one, of course, could deny that, taken as a whole, his many contributions to philosophy are first and foremost that of a logician, and not of a specialist of ethics or esthetics — especially if the latter is understood to be the philosophical science of the fine arts. At several occasions Peirce mentions that he considers himself ill informed, even incompetent, with regards to esthetic matters. "Like most logicians," he wrote in 1903, "I have pondered that subject far too little" (*CP* 2.197). But to this he adds immediately thereafter: "Esthetics and logic seem, at first blush, to belong to different universes. It is only very recently that I have become persuaded that that seeming is illusory, and that, on the contrary, logic needs the help of esthetics. The matter is not yet very clear to me."

Peirce's initial hesitancy regarding esthetics may be accounted for in several ways. On one hand, he was reluctant to consider it to be a true normative science on the basis that "*de gustibus et coloribus, non est disputandum*." In other words, the commonly held view of esthetics as the philosophy of taste and of the beautiful in the fine arts seemed to impede its conception as a true normative science. On the other hand, there was the problem of psychologism. We know that Peirce always refused to found his logic or epistemology upon psychological ground. This was precisely what he found objectionable in German philosophy. One of the possible pitfalls of esthetics considered as a normative science alongside logic, therefore, was that its concern for "feeling" might lead to psychologism in any effort to unite the normative sciences. Finally, an evil just as serious was the threat of relating logic and its search for truth to the quest of sensual pleasures. For whatever its form, hedonism was for Peirce an irrational doctrine and therefore one incompatible with logic. Esthetics could only be integrated into Peirce's conception of the normative sciences once he could make sure these pitfalls were avoided, illustrating in the process how it could belong to the same "universe" as logic (and ethics).

This "universe," for sure, is one governed by the architectonic scheme offered by the Categories, as is, for that matter, all that which pertains to Peirce's mature attempts at the classification of the sciences. There is no room here to go into a detailed account of such a rich taxonomic endeavor.<sup>5</sup> Suffice to say that Peirce saw the normative sciences as belonging to the sciences of discovery, and more specifically to philosophy — the latter finding its place between mathematics and the special sciences (in short: the physical and the psychical sciences). Philosophy itself being divided into three scientific sub-classes: phaneroscopy, the normative sciences (where one finds esthetics, ethics, and logic), and metaphysics. The three-part division of philosophy as well as that of the normative sciences are made on the basis of how a given science foregrounds aspects of the three Categories of Firstness, Secondness, and Thirdness. Simply put, this implies that the normative sciences, being set between phaneroscopy-First and metaphysics-Third, must display characteristics of Secondness. Next, the internal sub-division of the normative sciences implies that, relative to one another, they all display different categorial characteristics: monadicity of esthetics, dyadicity of ethics, triadicity of logic. Finally, according to Peirce's categorial taxonomic scheme sciences which are "Firsts" offer operating principles to those that are "Second" and "Third", and those that are "Second" do the same for those that are "Third" — this is how one must understand Peirce's statement that "logic needs the help of esthetics."<sup>6</sup>

In short, according to this breakdown esthetics must manifest a dyadic character,

just as ethics and logic do — this is related to their status as “normative sciences” (see below) —, but it must also manifest a monadic character such that it may further determine itself in ethics and logic, which evidence dominant dyadic and triadic characters respectively. The sum of these categorial characteristics (dyadicity of the normative sciences relative to the monadicity of phanerology and to the triadicity of metaphysics; monadicity of esthetics relative to the dyadicity of ethics and to the triadicity of logic) is what formally defines Peirce’s conception of esthetics, ethics, and logic.

Peirce insists on the fact that the normative sciences are not concerned by *what is* or by *what must be*, rather they seek to examine the conditions of possibility for *what ought to be* with regards to feeling, conduct, and thought. More specifically, explains Peirce, they investigate “the universal and necessary laws of the relation of Phenomena to *Ends*” (CP 5.121). This is why he also states that the normative sciences are the “most purely theoretical of purely theoretical sciences (CP 1.281). Thus, contrary to certain *practical* sciences that claim to discriminate and evaluate concrete and manifest feelings, actions, and thoughts, the normative sciences offer a theoretical investigation of the conditions that make possible these sorts of discrimination and evaluation in the first place. Now, the only way to consider what *ought to be* with regards to feeling, conduct, and thought and therefore to envisage possible discrimination and evaluation in these matters — for instance: to distinguish between an ethically good and a bad action — is to conceive of *ends* or *ideals* which ought to be conformed with as much as possible so that they may accomplish or fulfill themselves. This also serves to explain the dominant dyadic nature of the normative sciences. Indeed, what *ought to be* — that is to say, *the conformity of phenomena to ends conceived conditionally* — should not be understood as the result of either chance or necessity, but rather as the outcome of a rational process of deliberation subjected to critical self-control conducive to the formation and to the growth of habits. Thus, even though ends are Thirds for Peirce, the appeal to deliberation and self-control — which always imply effort or resistance — as the condition making possible the free conformity of phenomena to ends evidences the duality that confers to the normative sciences their dominant dyadic character.<sup>7</sup>

If esthetics shares with ethics and logic this dyadic character as a determining trait of normativity, it also possesses a monadic quality which, as mentioned above, characterizes it relative to the dyadicity of ethics and to the triadicity of logic. This further breakdown reflects the nature of the aboutness of each of the three sciences: qualities of feeling in the case of esthetics, conduct in the case of ethics, and thought or the use of signs in the case of logic. As we shall now see, this division also

illustrates the overarching architectonic categorial scheme of the classification of the sciences, according to which logic and ethics require the help of esthetics.

For Peirce, the indebtedness of ethics and logic to esthetics lies at the very heart of the normativity and the rationality of both sciences. For to be truly normative and rational ethics and logic require ideals or ends, that is, something admirable that conduct and thought seek to carry out or accomplish in a concrete manner through the formation and the development of rational habits. These ends are simply that against which conduct and thought may be measured and evaluated. However, *the adoption of an ideal* and the attempt to see it through by way of our actions and our thinking first presupposes *the possibility of forming ideals* such that they can associate with something admirable in itself, independently of anything else, a *supreme ideal*. Such an ideal is precisely the object of esthetics and this is why both ethics and logic can be said to require the help of the first of the three normative sciences. No longer the science of the beautiful in the fine arts, esthetics becomes for Peirce the science of the admirable in itself, the science of ends, of which the good in ethics and truth in logic constitute further, specialized, determinations. More specifically, esthetics is the science that studies the formation of ideals and of the supreme ideal, the *summum bonum*. But esthetics not only offers ethics and logic the ground for their own normativity and rationality, indeed it is itself a rational and normative science. The idea is well encapsulated when Peirce states that “if conduct is to be thoroughly deliberate, the ideal must be a habit of feeling which has grown up under the influence of a course of self-criticism and of heterocriticisms; and the theory of the deliberate formation of such habits of feeling is what ought to be meant by *esthetics*” (EP 2: 378). Let us examine the idea more closely.

The ideal which Peirce has in mind is such that it must be *admirable in itself*, that is, its admirableness must be independent from any reason, indeed independent from anything else. This implies that it must chiefly be conceived from the point of view of Firstness, as a *quality of feeling*, to which Peirce adds that it is a *habit of feeling*.

<sup>8</sup> From the start, this excludes making pleasure the end or supreme ideal since, like pain, it is not a quality of feeling strictly speaking — nor is it a habit of feeling —, but rather, according to Peirce, a “secondary” feeling or a form of generalization that groups together different qualities of feeling which must nonetheless remain separate and distinct in themselves (indeed, though both may be said to be painful, the *sui generis* feeling of a tooth ache remains distinct from that of an arm being broken).<sup>9</sup> If pleasure does indeed accompany the accomplishment of the ideal, it is as a symptom, not as a cause. But what exactly is a *habit of feeling*?

We know that Peirce understands habit in relation to phenomena exhibiting the

tendency to spread out into a continuum, that is to say, to regularize and to reproduce themselves indefinitely in the future. This tendency manifests itself in the fact that once a phenomenon appears, the possibility of another one just like it appearing in the future becomes more likely. Qualities of feeling are monads and thus unrelated to anything else, and yet, by their very appearance they acquire the power of making their reproduction, their growth, and their regularization more likely than before. Once regularized in this fashion, qualities of feeling become what Peirce calls *ideas*. Indeed, writes Peirce, when feelings “become welded together in association, the result is a general idea” (CP 6.137). This is the very principle of habit-taking that Peirce describes as the ‘law of mind’: “Feeling tends to spread; connections between feelings awaken feelings; neighboring feelings become assimilated; ideas are apt to reproduce themselves. These are so many formulations of the one law of the growth of mind” (CP 6.21). Consequently, the *summum bonum* may be defined as the quality of feeling of the admirable in itself which spreads, grows, and reproduces itself by habit, for as Peirce says it is a *habit of feeling*. Now, in as much as this habit is teleological — and therefore controlled —, the growth of this quality of feeling corresponds to the very principle of rationality. This leads Peirce to conclude that the only thing that is admirable in itself, independently of any reason, is reason itself. But reason here must not be understood as nor reduced to a faculty. Rather, we must see it as the quality of feeling that regularizes itself in the *idea of reason*, as its very essence whose character is to be in a state of constant incipency. This state may be described as *the never-fully-embodied habit the universe has developed of acquiring habits in an ever more controlled fashion, of constantly growing in concrete reasonableness*. It is this quality that is admirable and that enables us to conceive of the *summum bonum* as lying in the “rationalization of the universe” (CP 1.590), or as corresponding to the “development of concrete reasonableness” in the universe (CP 5.3).

Only by maintaining that the formation of this ideal worthy of adoration is subject to a process of self- and heretocriticisms can Peirce argue that esthetics manifests the characteristic dyadicity of the normative sciences mentioned above. However, since criticism seeks to control the conditions according to which a phenomenon — the *summum bonum*, in this case — can embody and fulfill an ideal *whose attractiveness or admirableness acts upon it as does a final cause*, we are left to wonder how to avoid an infinite regress of ideals in accounting for the normativity of esthetics. The only possible answer I can think of that is congruent with Peirce’s views — though it is left implicit by him — *is to consider in itself the supreme ideal as that which corresponds to the very formation and growth of ideals*.

This implies that the *summum bonum* is itself its own norm, since the growth of concrete reasonableness in the universe would be impossible and unthinkable were it not for the formation and growth of ideals.

With the *summum bonum* reason contemplates itself and, like some great Narcissus, brings to bear upon itself the power of its own attractiveness in an attempt to achieve its accomplishment. In other words, the ideal that makes possible criticism, that which makes possible approval or disapproval in the formation of the *summum bonum*, corresponds to the principle or process that governs its very formation. According to this process, ideas form themselves and grow through an ever more controlled course of associations between qualities of feeling. As mentioned earlier, this is what Peirce calls the 'law of mind' or 'law of habit-taking,' whose rationality lies at the heart of esthetic normativity. Now, not all actions prescribed by this law may appear rational to us, that is, from our limited human perspective, as some — like perception, for instance — are beyond our control. (Of course, logic for Peirce impels that we consider phenomena in ways unrestrained by the psychological limitations of our *human* mind). The important point, however, is to understand that the law of mind constitutes an essential condition for the emergence of rationality, being entirely compatible with it for at least two reasons. On the one hand, the formation and the reinforcement of habits of feeling, the rejection of past ideals and the formation of new ones, the growth of habits of feeling and their influence over other habits of feeling, all require procedures of control analogous to those found in ethics and logic. According to Peirce, these procedures possess the formal characteristics of either abduction, induction, or deduction (*CP* 6.144-6.147). On the other hand, habit-taking and habit-growth set up the conditions for *both* a) the formation of ideals — ideals are hierarchized habits: they are formed by way of habits being formed, by their growth, and by other habits being discarded in time — *and* b) the growth of self-control according to which the entire habit-taking process that characterizes the law of mind continually grows in rationality.

Obviously one cannot envisage the formation of a first ideal, of some initial manifestation of the *summum bonum* — anymore than one could envisage the emergence of the first sign — since every rational action and every rational thought require an ideal that it attempts to carry out concretely by conforming to it. At best may we envisage the formation, by way of chance initially, of an extremely vague ideal ceaselessly determining itself while also growing in complexity and variety through the conjugated and opposite effects of chance and habit. The notion that ideals can grow thus implies a constant process of revision, re-evaluation, and criticism. Not surprisingly, this picture of growth is analogous to how Peirce, in his cosmological



writings, conceived of the teleological evolution of the universe. As early as "A Guess at the Riddle," Peirce claimed that one finds three elements that are active in the world: "first, chance; second, law; and third, habit-taking" (*W6*, p. 208). If habit-taking is third, it is because it enables mediation between a universe entirely governed by chance in some infinitely remote past and, at the other end of the spectrum, in some infinitely remote future, a universe entirely governed by law. This future universe would be one completely under the sway of reason, yet it would be one from which reason itself — understood as that which "always must be in a state of incipency, of growth" (*CP* 1.615) — would necessarily be absent. Therefore, it is in the interval between these two infinitely remote points that the law of mind comes to manifest itself. With it, reason appears as an incessantly emerging and perpetually growing property predicating everything in the universe, until it is replaced in some infinitely distant future by law, that is, by a habit having practically lost all of its plasticity, a habit that chance can no longer influence — such a future, need we add, would be analogous to death (*CP* 8.317). Finally, since the tendency to develop habits occupies a space in between two asymptotic points, it is impossible, explains Peirce, to conceive of any actual moment in the past or future where this tendency would be absent, just as it is impossible to conceive of any actual moment in the future from which chance would be absent.

Not only does the *summum bonum* correspond to Peirce's scheme for growth in the universe, it also yields to this scheme in subjecting the formation of all our ideals to it. The *summum bonum* therefore appears as an indefinitely *growing process of growth*, as does its mode of growth. This implies both a growth *of* rationality, but also a growth *within* rationality, or, to put it differently, growth in the very exercise of self-control. For as Peirce writes, in its most advanced stages, evolution or the development of reason "takes place more and more largely through self-control" (*CP* 5.433). Concretely, this translates into ever more opportunities to criticize our habits and even our ideals. In fact, the possibility for such criticism is a necessary outcome of the growth of reasonableness. By submitting our habits and our ideals to self-control and criticism, either for approval or disapproval, final causation can begin to know itself and make itself known, which in turn may lead to ends being further developed, refined, and even modified if need be.

To belong to the continuum of the *summum bonum* — much like the conclusion of an induction can be said to belong to a continuous series of experimentations — an idea must possess *admirableness*, it must be *fine* or "*kalos*" (an ancient Greek word usually translated as "beautiful", though the latter, claims Peirce, is inadequate to express its meaning). In an unpublished definition likely written as an addition to

one of the *Century Dictionary*'s entries (c. 1888-1889), Peirce states that admiration

[...] is simply a high degree of emotional approval of, or delight in any object as being such or acting as it does regardless of any ulterior considerations of utility, interest, morality, or truth. Thus, I may admire the simplicity of a woman's dress, or the accuracy of a man's language, without any particular wonder at it. [...] My admiration consists in the delight I take in looking at the one or attending to the other. I may wonder at God's creation of the world. But if he was to create it at all there can be no wonder that he made it one way rather than another. Neither can there have been any utility or advantage of any kind of which we can have cognizance in its being constructed one way rather than another. But that he created a world capable of developing ends is something which, though taken as a whole it subserves no purpose whatsoever, excites an emotion in me which corresponds, as I think to some real general attribute of goodness ["goodness" was struck from the manuscript] or excellence; and that emotion together with my deliberate acceptance of it as a judgment, constitutes admiration (Ms 1597a)

The passage is interesting in showing that a great number of things may be admired at any given moment, such as clothes, rhetoric, or more to the point, the development of ends in the universe. Indeed, men find different things admirable and have different ideals. Yet, the issue for esthetics, as we have seen, is not to consider what *is* or *may be* admirable but rather what *ought to be* admirable. Now, it follows from what was said earlier that in order "that it ought to be so", an admirable idea must be able to grow indefinitely, it must be capable of further determination and of determining itself in other ideas, notably through conduct and reasoning. In short, it must be *reasonable*. Moreover, it must also be able to *attract* us, to attract our habits, and, in order to be considered admirable in itself, it must be capable of attracting us before we can inductively measure the consequences of adopting it on our conduct or our reasoning.

This attraction lies in part on the compatibility of the idea with habits and ideals that have already been formed. However, this alone is insufficient. In fact, attraction for the *summum bonum* must first rely on what Peirce, in his cosmology, refers to as Love or the *agapastic* development of thought. "The agapastic development of thought," he writes, "is the adoption of certain mental tendencies, not altogether heedlessly as in tychasm [a mode of evolution resting on chance, as exemplified by Darwinianism], nor quite blindly by the mere force of circumstance or of logic, as in anancasm [a mode of evolution resting on necessity, as exemplified by Hegelianism], but by an immediate attraction for the idea itself, whose nature is divined before the mind possesses it, by the power of sympathy, that is by virtue of the continuity of mind" (CP 6.307).

There is an obvious resemblance here between agapastic development and Peirce's conception of the norm of validity of abduction. Indeed, according to him, the only way that one can explain the success of abductive reasoning, and by the same token, the progress of scientific inquiry, is to consider that hypotheses must first *appear* adequate to us thanks to a sort of natural insight or instinct (Galileo's "*il lume naturale*") according to which human beings, notwithstanding all the failings of their conjecturing, evidence a tendency to guess the truth. And although this is the only sort of epistemic assurance that abduction affords, it nonetheless constitutes a rational form of control, as weak as it may be. This same sort of abductive assurance, namely, the fact that an idea appears immediately attractive, equally secures the rationality in the formation of new ideals. It explains not only the success, but also the general tendency we exhibit of advancing reason despite all our collective failings in this regard.

A unique feature of Peirce's agapasticism resides in how novelty and chance are integrated in its account of the teleological — *though non necessary* — evolution of the universe. A similar picture can be drawn to account for the formation and evolution of the *summum bonum* and of ideals which, because they serve the normativity of ethics and logic and, therefore, equally serve the rationality of metaphysics and of all the special sciences, enable us to contribute to the evolving universe, to give "a hand toward rendering the world more reasonable" (CP 1.615). According to the doctrine of agapasticism, the initial chance emerging of qualities of feeling, their subsequent growth into growing habits of feeling, establish *teloi* that increase the probability for the growth of continua of qualities of feeling. The recurrence of this process with various qualities of feeling, different habits, entails numerous *teloi* subject to ordering themselves hierarchically, to opposing one another, to grow, to perfect or transform themselves. At the same time, the general tendency to acquire habits undergoes a similar process through the recursive application of its own habit. What clearly distinguishes agapasticism from necessitarianism (or anancasticism) is the way it conceives of final causality not as absolute, immutable, and eternal laws, but rather as habits whose evolution, despite its telos, must make room for chance, spontaneity, and creativity. For habits are *tendencies*, not *laws*, which is why chance may manifest itself in agapastic evolution.<sup>10</sup> As a result, Peirce can assert, without any paradox, that evolution leads to an increase in complexity and diversity in the universe all the while reducing in it the role played by chance. From the standpoint of practicality, it is obvious that esthetic normativity, in relying chiefly on attraction or insight — that is to say, on the only form of assurance afforded by abduction —, offers very little security in making esthetic discriminations in the

actual process of forming new ideals. Yet, this being said, one must not believe that Peirce conceived of abduction as an unbridled process of invention arrived at through the sole agency of *pure chance*. Rather, he saw it as a process of forming hypotheses *subject to final causation*. This means that abduction's rationality — based on our ability to insightfully guess the truth, to instinctively grasp the continuity of things — is itself increasing, if only infinitesimally, as it takes into consideration other, established, hypotheses.<sup>11</sup> Guessing right, in other words, is also subject to growth. Now, the more an ideal or a habit of feeling grows and consolidates, the more qualities of feeling tend to be attracted to it. A simple example can serve to illustrate the point. Imagine a young filmgoer who develops a taste for so-called “modernist” cinema. A film by Antonioni may lead him to discover the work of Godard or Pasolini, and then that of Glauber Rocha, Chris Marker, or even Robbe-Grillet. At each stage the developing habit of feeling is likely to find greater assurance and grow, so that the young man's taste may eventually affirm itself and even produce hierarchies. In the process, this taste or ideal — that is to say, whatever had initially attracted the young filmgoer to Antonioni and then to the work of the other filmmakers — is further determined and, in a sense, can start becoming aware of itself and of its own identity. Yet, despite the growth in our abductive ability to guess right, greater assurance in exercising self-control and discriminating between our ideals can only come from considering the consequences of adopting them with regards to conduct or thought — either by way of imagination through deduction or concretely through induction. The upshot being that esthetics, while it is concerned with the rational formation of ideals, is ill-equipped to handle discrimination between them, independently from ethics and logic. This may explain why Peirce claims that the characteristic dualism of the normative sciences, patent in both ethics and logic, “is softened almost to obliteration in esthetics” (*EP* 2, 379). “Nonetheless”, he adds, “it would be the height of stupidity to say that esthetics knows no good and bad”. Thus in his writings Peirce offers, here and there, examples of ideas he considered to be admirable. These include truth and justice (*CP* 1.348, 5.431, 8.272), the three theological virtues or habits of charity, hope, and faith — to which Peirce gave a logical turn (*CP* 2.645-2.668)—, and, of course, love (*CP* 6.287-6.317). However, it may well be with the famous “Neglected Argument for the Reality of God” that Peirce presents most compellingly the formation of an esthetic idea, that of God, whose description bears stunning resemblance to that which he gives the *summum bonum*. For Peirce, all these ideas are admirable because they belong to the continuum of reason, the continuum of the *summum bonum*. They are reasonable feelings or “logical sentiments” (*CP* 2.652-2.655) whose adoption as ideals — as a result of

our habits being indefinitely attracted and harmoniously associated to them — makes us partake in the growth of concrete reasonableness in the world. Now, one might well say of a person who adopts such habits of feeling as ideals that they are cultivating a *taste* for reason and that the admirable in esthetics is all that which is continuous with such a taste, that is to say, all that which is perceived as being compatible with it or as possessing the quality it approves or looks for, and through which it can grow, improve, renew or even transform itself. This taste for reason which we all possess, though some cultivate it more fervently than others, is that which might equally be known as *the taste for Thirdness*.

### Esthetics and Art

The above survey of some key aspects of Peirce's esthetics may help measure the considerable distance that separates his normative conception of this science from that of the majority of modern philosophers who narrow its domain to the fine arts exclusively. More recently, that is, starting at the turn of the last century, most thinkers have endeavored instead to ban normativity from their conceptions of *artistic* production, products, and reception. As a result, few contemporary estheticians, or art theorists, have shown much interest in this aspect of Peirce's philosophy. Not surprisingly, perhaps, Peirce himself considered, around 1905, jettisoning the term "esthetics" altogether as the designation for the first of the three normative sciences, and replacing it with the neologism "*axiagastics*" — from the Greek "*axiagastos*", which means "worthy of admiration". Yet this is not to say that one cannot use Peirce's esthetics to investigate a number of issues that have been significant in the tradition of Western art theory. Thus, for instance, a few years ago, Douglas Anderson examined artistic creativity in relation to agapastic evolution, which, as we saw earlier, underlies the theory of the formation of ideals and of the *summum bonum*.<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, the same *developmental teleology* might also be called upon to investigate such issues as the formation of artistic genres, themes, or even that of artistic personality or style. Finally, if Hegel could conceive of the history of art as the progress and realization of *Geist*, there is no doubt that, forgoing Hegelian necessitarianism, and with sufficient patience and ingenuity, one could envisage instead an agapastic perspective on the history of art. Of course, I'm skeptical about the prospect of this kind of project fitting-in with current trends and with the overall "*goût du jour*" in esthetics and art theory, and I have no way of knowing in advance what results it might yield. Nevertheless, such a history would undoubtedly appear as a series of series of ends constantly emerging, forming and developing themselves — possibly through chance alone initially and later through more controlled means —

, while others are transformed and eventually abandoned. In short, it would likely show the history of art to be an infinitely complex network or web created out of a multiplicity of histories and *teloi*.

But such considerations are not what concern me here. Indeed, rather than attempt to “apply” Peirce’s views to some aspect of the practice or the theory of art (eg., creativity, historiography of art, style, genre), or even to a particular work of art, my intention is to examine how art fits into Peirce’s esthetic theory and to consider what, if anything, the latter has to offer esthetics (or *aesthetics*) in the current usage of the term. What, then, is the place of art within Peirce’s esthetic theory?

At first glance, one might be tempted to answer that there is none; that Peirce’s esthetic theory is in no way concerned with art. But such, however, is not entirely the case. In fact, in at least one key essay, Peirce, as we shall see below, ties the presentation of basic aspects of his esthetic theory to a few brief, though important, remarks on art and on the “esthetic enjoyment” that the contemplation of an artwork may produce in us. As brief as they may be, these observations open up a series of questions: What is the meaning of art for Peirce’s esthetic? Is it merely one of many examples that can serve to illustrate the function of esthetics, or is there an implicit theory of art “hidden” somewhere in Peirce’s esthetics? What counts as admirable or *kalos* in art? What is the role of art with respect to the growth of concrete reasonableness in the universe?

As mentioned earlier, we all possess a taste for reason and all of us collectively participate in the realization of the *summum bonum* through our habits, the formation of our ideals, and the rationality of our ethics (our conduct) and logic (our thought). In this sense, artistic practice is no different from other rational human enterprises: artists form ideals, adopt them, and attempt to fulfill them. The implication is that artistic practice is subject to the theoretical principles of the normative sciences, just like any other practical sphere of human activity. This, of course, is a commonplace and Kant, for one, made essentially the same claim when, in the *Critique of Judgment*, he wrote in §43 that “by right we ought only to describe as Art, production through freedom, i.e. through a will that places Reason at the basis of its actions.”<sup>13</sup> On this ground, one could certainly consider studying how artists form and express ideals, how these ideals manifest themselves in their work, or the way that artists have of adopting and incarnating habits and, then, of abandoning them for the development of new habits. And to some extent, art historians often do just that when they study the style of an artist. Now, as long as the end of a work of art could be said to find expression in those artistic habits that have led to its realization and to serve no other ideal than to enable such habits to grow so as to render possible (or ever more

likely) the emergence of other works where the same ideal could find expression, and so on indefinitely, the practice of art could be considered as admirable in itself, at least, *in so far as the artist and the act of artistic creation are concerned*. Yet what about art understood not as an object of willful or rational creation, but rather as an object of experience? For although it could be argued that the practice of art, as just described, belongs to (or better yet: *is continuous with*) the *summum bonum*, nothing in what has been said so far implies that the product of this practice, i.e. art itself, equally belongs to it.

Let us begin with a truism: by not making art or the beautiful the object of his esthetic theory, Peirce avoids folding the esthetic onto the artistic. The same might be said of Kant to the extent that he made nature, not art, the pragmatidmatic *locus* of the esthetic. Yet, by approaching it in terms of the beautiful and of disinterested pleasure it could be said that the *Critique of Judgment* was nonetheless conducive to the further conflation of the esthetic with the artistic. Peirce, on the other hand, fully understood that the use of the term “beautiful” would have considerably narrowed the province of his esthetic theory. Indeed, as he saw it, esthetics was the theoretical science whose object was the growth of qualities of feeling into ideals. Art being made up of qualities of feeling — much like perception in this regard — it is the formation of ideals within its sphere, the presence of habits of feeling attracting other habits of feeling in their orbit, that will fall under the umbrella of esthetics.

Looking at what Peirce wrote on the subject of esthetics, there appears to be only one paper where one can find more than mere passing remarks concerning art. The piece in question is “The Seven Systems of Metaphysics”, the 4<sup>th</sup> in the Harvard lecture series on pragmatism of 1903. In a section entitled “The Reality of Firstness” we find an unusual amount of observations pertaining to the activity of artists, “esthetic enjoyment” and, as we shall soon see, a remarkable comparison between the universe and a work of art. The same section, moreover, is also concerned with *perception* as the royal road of access to qualities of feeling. Here, Peirce explains that qualities of feeling are *real* and that they are not a product of some individual’s mind, as is often believed by those who investigate such questions from the vantage point of psychology rather than logic. The very same point is also made later, albeit more succinctly, in the “Neglected Argument for the Reality of God”, where Peirce writes that Ideas (defined as “anything whose Being consists in its mere capacity for getting fully represented, regardless of any person’s faculty or impotence to represent [them]”, *EP* 2, p. 434) owe their Reality to “the mere capability of getting thought, not in anybody’s Actually thinking them” (*EP* 2, p. 435). According to Peirce, all that is present to some mind must be so through a quality of feeling, whether it is a perception,

a dream, a mathematical formula or an argument. Peirce conceived of the terms “quality” and “feeling” as practically interchangeable since feeling is the *undifferentiated* mode of Being of quality in consciousness. Indeed, there is simply no way we could distinguish between the *quality* of “red” and the *feeling* of “red.” Once they have actualized themselves in perceptual judgments, qualities of feeling become the first premisses of reasoning. We might say that they constitute the essential predicates — the *icons* — for all that which appears to the mind in its *suchness*. Qualities of feeling are thus of great import for everyone, yet they acquire special significance for those whose life is dedicated to them in one way or another, and especially artists and scientists who are both expressly concerned with the *suchness* of appearances. Artists, of course, often seek to make us aware of qualities of feeling by presenting them to us through the mediation of their art. As for scientists, their goal is to discover the distribution and regularization of qualities of feeling in nature, what we often refer to as the *laws* of nature.

We saw earlier how, for Peirce, esthetics is concerned with the formation of ideals and of the *summum bonum* out of qualities of feeling that grow and regularize themselves so as to form ideas and ideals. We also saw how, through his cosmology, he conceived of the universe as a growing mind, one subject to the same law of mind and agapastic evolution that equally determines the growth of the human mind. These ideas are brought together in the Harvard lecture when Peirce considers that what appears to us, through perception, as perceptual facts, are qualities of feeling of nature and therefore, we might add, possible ideas or even perhaps ideals of nature:

[...] if you ask me what part Qualities can play in the economy of the Universe, I shall reply that the Universe is a vast representamen, a great symbol of God’s purpose, working out its conclusions in living realities. Now every symbol must have, organically attached to it, its Indices of Reactions and its Icons of Qualities; and such part as these reactions and these qualities play in an argument, that they of course play in the Universe, that Universe being precisely an argument. In the little that you or I can make out of this huge demonstration, our perceptual judgments are the premisses *for us* and these perceptual judgments have icons as their predicates, in which *icons* Qualities are immediately presented. But what is first for us is not first in nature. The premisses of Nature’s own process are all the independent uncaused elements of fact that go to make up the variety of nature [...] Those premisses of nature, however, though they are not the *perceptual facts* that are premisses to us, nevertheless must resemble them in being premisses. We can only imagine what they are by comparing them with the premisses for us. As premisses they must involve Qualities. (EP 2, 193-4)

In as much as nature grows agapastically, and in as much as it is subject to the law of



mind, its qualities of feeling are most likely evolving into ever growing *ideas* and *ideals*. Indeed, Peirce was absolutely convinced that the laws of nature — or, better yet, the *habits of nature* — are subject to growth and agapastic evolution. This, however, clearly implies the existence of an *esthetic dimension* (as well as an ethical and a logical one) to the effective growth of the universe, a process whose “total effect is beyond our ken”, writes Peirce, “but [of which] we can *appreciate* in some measure the resultant Quality of parts of the whole” (ibid., emphasis mine). The *esthete* who can *appreciate* this quality, perhaps even more so than the artist, is undoubtedly the scientist whose quest to discover the *habits of nature* may now be recast as a quest for the *esthetic norms* or *ideals* of the universe. The artist, on the other hand, might seem confined (like the rest of us) to merely contemplate such ideals on the basis of what he perceives as qualities of feeling (the perceptual facts that form premisses *for us*).

Yet the artist, of course, does more than merely contemplate what he perceives as qualities of feeling. He must also *present* them to us and “most of his effort”, writes Peirce, goes to *reproducing* what he perceives. Surprisingly enough, however, we are told that the requirements of art narrow the artist’s capacity for esthetic appreciation, whereas Peirce himself claims to have undergone, throughout his lifetime, a systematic training program in recognizing his feelings which has likely given him “a fair share of capacity for esthetic enjoyment” (ibid):

The artist has such a training; but most of his effort goes to reproducing in one form or another what he sees or hears, which is in every art a very complicated trade; while I have striven simply to see what it is that I see. That this limitation of the task is a great advantage is proved to me by finding that the great majority of artists are extremely narrow. Their esthetic appreciations are narrow; and this comes from their only having the power of recognizing the qualities of their percepts in certain directions (Ibid).

But regardless of Peirce’s views on the “limited” esthetic appreciation of artists, an analogy begins to unfurl whose terms are the universe and the work of art. Like God, who produces a universe whose ideas and ideals appear to us as qualities of feeling from which, with the help of the law of mind, we may draw ideas and ideals of our own, the artist — despite his failings — produces a work where habits of feeling, and perhaps ideals, first appear to us as qualities of feeling by way of our perception of a work of art. If the universe offers itself as the growth and the making concrete of an idea turned into an ideal, Peirce seems to imply that this accounts holds equally for a work of art (I shall return below to consider the implications of the analogy). If works of art, then, fall under the umbrella of esthetics as I mentioned earlier, one could say that it is because all of us are, in some respect, “artists” the

moment our feelings form habits and our habits ideals whose purpose is to attract other feelings and ideals, and so on. In short, we might say that we each possess an esthetic "style" of our own. And it is this entire process, as we have seen, that Peirce considers worthy of admiration; which is why, to his mind, any narrowing down of esthetics to art or to a theory of sensual beauty would constitute an unacceptable limitation of the breadth of esthetics. This explains why Peirce, unlike most of his predecessors — save perhaps Plato in the *Symposium* or the *Phaedrus* — chooses to develop an esthetic theory, a theory of the admirable in itself, regardless of any major consideration for art.

Once we accept the irreducibility of the esthetic to the artistic, we can move on to consider the possible *integration* of the artistic within the esthetic. The goal is not to produce an *ars poetica*, but rather to theoretically consider the admirableness of art and its contribution to the *summum bonum*.

Now, the first observation we can draw from what has so far been said is that the admirable in art, or "esthetic excellence," shouldn't be looked for initially in *the material or plastic qualities of a work* (something Greek Antiquity was aware of, though in its own way, as can be seen in the *Greater Hippias*). The reason being that the qualities of a work constitute what is presented to our perception: they are Firsts and are present to our consciousness as icons in perceptual judgments. Every quality of feeling may be considered to be an idea *in potentia*, but as such, none should be considered *less* admirable than any other. The quality of feeling of "red" is thus no less admirable than that of "green," that of the *Mona Lisa* no less so than that of *Guernica*, or that of Duchamp's *Fountain*. The implication is that every quality of feeling, without discrimination whatsoever, offers *esthetic potential* (or *power*, in a mathematical sense). As Peirce writes in the 5<sup>th</sup> Harvard lecture (« The Three Normative Sciences »):

In the light of the doctrine of categories I should say that an object, to be esthetically good, must have a multitude of parts so related to one another as to impart a positive simple immediate quality to their totality; and whatever does this is, in so far, esthetically good, no matter what the particular quality of the total may be. If that quality be such as to nauseate us, to scare us, or otherwise to disturb us to the point of throwing us out of the mood of esthetic enjoyment, out of the mood of simply contemplating the embodiment of the quality — just, for example, as the Alps affected the people of old times, when the state of civilization was such that an impression of great power was inseparably associated with lively apprehension and terror — then the object remains none the less esthetically good, although people in our condition are incapacitated from a calm esthetic contemplation of it. [...] I am seriously inclined to doubt there being any distinction of pure esthetic betterness and worseness. My notion would be

that there are innumerable varieties of esthetic quality, but no purely esthetic grade of excellence (*EP* 2, pp. 201-202).<sup>14</sup>

What may strike us today in these ideas, once we apply them to art, is their resolutely *modern* character. Indeed, the upshot of separating the esthetic from the artistic and from sensual beauty is that all qualities, even “ugliness” or “difformity,” must be regarded as possessing *full* esthetic potential. How much Peirce knew about the burgeoning modern art scene in 1903 is impossible for me to tell. There is no reason to think, however, that he could have foreseen the coming of Duchamp’s *Readymades* (first produced only ten years after the Harvard lectures!), Dada, or Warhol’s *Brillo Boxes*. Yet an astute listener, pondering or *mus*ing the consequences of Peirce’s words outside the confines of their application to logic and applying them instead to the artworld, might well have been led to guess at the possibility of such new artforms and consider the “crisis” of Western art that was already brewing. But whatever the case may be, the crux of the matter is that we should look elsewhere for the source of our attraction to works of art. But where?

The answer lies in two passages from the 4<sup>th</sup> Harvard lecture to which I alluded to earlier and to which we can now return. The first one is concerned with the sort of experience a work of art may afford its viewer, what Peirce calls “esthetic enjoyment. He writes:

[...] and ignorant as I am of Art, I have a fair share of capacity for esthetic enjoyment; and it seems to me that while in esthetic enjoyment we attend to the totality of Feeling — and especially to the total resultant Quality of Feeling presented in the work of art we are contemplating — yet it is a sort of intellectual sympathy, a sense that here is a Feeling that one can comprehend, a reasonable Feeling. I do not succeed in saying exactly what it is, but it is a consciousness belonging to the category of Representation, though representing something in the Category of Quality of Feeling. (*EP* 2, p. 190)

What does this characterization of the esthetic experience of art reveal? Or, more to the point: toward what manifestation of the “admirable in itself” is the art viewer’s *attraction* or *sympathy* directed to on the basis of a guess (an abduction)? Peirce claims that what is involved in the esthetic experience of art is a *reasonable feeling*, one that offers itself to consciousness as belonging to Thirdness (the category of Representation) though it represents a First. Such characterization might seem paradoxical in light of Peirce’s categorial scheme. For how can a quality of feeling belong to Thirdness and represent something that belongs to Firstness? The answer lies in semeiotic: *iconicity* alone can account for the peculiar state of affairs Peirce is describing here. Granted, as I stated earlier, that all which is present to consciousness

must be so by way of a quality of feeling, *including signs, which belong to Thirdness*, it would seem that what Peirce is really describing here is *the contemplation of signhood (i.e. the quality of a sign qua sign) iconically standing for itself*. Indeed, 1) understood that signs are Thirds; 2) understood that Thirdness is the category of mind; and 3) understood that the essence of Thirdness-mind lies in continuous growth according to the law of mind, it follows that the *sui generis* quality signs actualize — not in body but in soul<sup>15</sup> — can only be that of a *reasonable feeling*. I take it, then, that Peirce is saying that esthetic experience involves consciousness of “representedness.” The latter, moreover, can only but *attract* us, or form a *sympathetic bond* with us, since both it and our mind belong to the same *continuum*.

This hypothesis gains in credibility when, just a few paragraphs later, Peirce compares the universe to a work of art:

The Universe as an argument is necessarily a great work of art, a great poem — for every fine argument is a poem and a symphony — just as every true poem is a sound argument. But let us compare it rather with a painting — with an impressionist seashore piece — then every Quality in a Premiss is one of the elementary colored particles of the Painting; they are all meant to go together to make up the intended Quality that belongs to the whole as whole. That total effect is beyond our ken; but we can appreciate in some measure the resultant Quality of parts of the whole — which Qualities result from the combinations of elementary Qualities that belong to the premisses. (*EP* 2, 194)

The statement is not without reminding us of Schelling who, in his *Philosophy of art*, claimed that “the universe is God in the form of the absolute work of art and in eternal beauty”.<sup>16</sup> Without a doubt, however, the difference in the two statements rests on how both philosophers conceive of the universe and its evolution, and consequently, on how both conceive the work of art. The specificity of the universe for Peirce, as we have seen, is that it shares all the essential attributes of mind and, therefore, of Thirdness. This is why the universe is a sign, even an argument — which is to say the most complete sign according to the classification of signs Peirce produced that same year for the Lowell Institute lectures.<sup>17</sup> By 1903, of course, all the fundamentals of Peirce’s cosmology were already well in place, and he conceived of the universe as he did a growing mind whose tendency to acquire habits manifests itself through the evolution of habits or laws of physics and nature. The universe, in short, is a rationally embodied idea endlessly growing in variety and complexity. Could a semiotician ever consider a more fitting definition of a work of art?

If the universe, as argument, can be compared with a work of art by virtue of its

semeiotic character, it can only be so because the qualities of an artwork, like those of the universe, require embodiment through interpretants. Esthetic contemplation, the *reasonable feeling* Peirce is at pains to describe, constitutes the first step towards this embodiment. But this reasonable feeling that attracts us to a work of art isn't a quality of feeling such as the quality of "blue" or "red." For as I mentioned above, all qualities are equally admirable or attractive. Rather, we must conceive of it as an *idea* or a *habit of feeling* capable of attracting or pulling towards it different qualities of feeling that belong to the work, or *different perceptions* of it. Such an idea would be *vague*, but one that would seek to determine itself through various interpretants, as we *interpret* the work. It would follow that interpreting a work of art is a way to ensure the growth of qualities of feeling that belong to it into habits of feeling in the hope of concretely "realizing" the work.

Peirce, then, seems to suggest that what attracts us towards art is a *semeiotic* quality *qua* quality of mind or quality of Thirdness. This quality would embody itself in the viewer as a habit of feeling and, through the work of interpretation, in habits of action and thought. Now it might be objected that this is true for *all* signs, not just works of art, and that consequently all signs are likely to produce "*esthetic enjoyment*" as a symptom or result of *semiosis*. This is correct, I believe. But although every sign can indeed lead to contemplation in such a manner, we need to realize also how in our cultures it has, for the longest time, been incumbent upon what we call art to ensure and create an environment for this sort of contemplation. I shall try to be more precise by referring to an example of a "perfect" semiotic process borrowed from a 1906 manuscript for a projected article entitled "The Basis of Pragmatism in the Normative Sciences"

A sign [...] just in so far as it fulfills the function of a sign, and none other, perfectly conforms to the definition of a medium of communication. It is determined by the object, but in no other respect than goes to enable it to act upon the interpreting quasi-mind; and the more perfectly it fulfills its function as a sign, the less effect it has upon that quasi-mind other than that of determining it as if the object itself had acted upon it. Thus, after an ordinary conversation, a wonderfully perfect kind of sign-functioning, one knows what information or suggestion has been conveyed, but will be utterly unable to say in what words it was conveyed, and often will think it was conveyed in words, when in fact it was only conveyed in tones or in facial expressions. (*EP* 2, p.391)

As I read this passage I cannot help but think of the actor's performance in theater. We know that a good deal of the thespian's art lies in the ability to convey information — usually fictional — through tone of voice and facial expressions. The theater

lover who appreciates performance looks for these signs, in part so as to contemplate them as *expressive* or *semiotic* forms. This is what, from a completely different semiotic tradition, Roman Jakobson used to call the “poetic function” of communication. Reflecting on Peirce’s example for “perfect” semiosis, one could say that in ordinary conversation “esthetic enjoyment” is usually minimal, whereas in the theater it tends to maximize itself. There, and through abduction, the sign will initially be interpreted as an icon — a rheme, in fact — of the *summum bonum* (which is to say, the sign will be appreciated *as* sign). If all signs have the potential to be so contemplated and interpreted, it would appear that the semiotic function of art is to bring semiosis to our consciousness as an object of contemplation, to enable us to “esthetically enjoy” the reasonable feeling of semiosis. And yet, the attention for the sign itself — for its signhood — in no way implies that it is incapable of normal semiotic functioning (i.e. of conveying information about its object), since it is this functioning, after all, that is admirable in itself.

Now, what Peirce calls “esthetic enjoyment” requires that we attend as much as possible to the entire array of expressive means that make up a sign, granted that, as he writes in “*Kaina Stoicheia*” (“New Elements”), “a whole book is a sign,” as is a whole literature (EP 2, p. 303). In the 5<sup>th</sup> Harvard lecture of the 1903 series, Peirce explains that there exists “a special variety of esthetic goodness that may belong to a representamen, namely, expressiveness” (EP 2, p.203). Every sign *must* possess it to some degree. Peirce then adds two other modes of goodness with regards to representation, *veracity* which he considers to be a moral goodness and *truth* which is a logical mode of goodness. The esthetic function of what we call “works of art” implies contemplation of “esthetic goodness”, or *semiotic expressivity*. Now, modern and contemporary art have indeed shown us that any expression, any sign, can be *contemplated* with regards to its *expressivity* — from Barnett Newman’s color field paintings to Piero Manzoni’s *Merda d’artista* tin cans. As for moral or logical goodness, there is nothing to prevent any sufficiently complete sign from embodying them, though these further determinations of the *summum bonum* imply other functions than the purely esthetic one.

To *contemplate* a sign (as sign) is also, of course, to contemplate its *interpretability* to which contemplation itself belongs. For in the end, *interpretation* — that aspect of semiosis which pertains to interpretants — is how all signs, including works of art, can hope to *achieve* goodness. But interpretation (including its performance by a reasonable agent) is also itself a habit that grows in complexity and variety, despite the growth of its reasonableness. Its source is an abduction, a feeling of attraction, something that resides in the way our perceptions are moved by an idea that emerges

along with that very attractiveness. Its only security, at this stage, is instinct. It is a manifestation of what Peirce, in his “Neglected Argument for the Reality of God” relates to “Pure Play” or *musement*. Indeed, Peirce explains that musement and esthetic contemplation are both *forms* of pure play, the only difference being that in musement one “considers some wonder in one of the Universes [of which there are three: the Universe of Ideas or Firsts; the Universe of Brute Actuality or Seconds; the Universe of signs or Thirds] or some connection between two of the three, *with speculation concerning its cause*” (EP 2, p. 436, emphasis mine). It is through such play that, in contemplating a work of art, in contemplating a sign *qua* sign, reason contemplates itself by way of mind (or Thirdness). Of course, we cannot expect that everyone will be able to contemplate and interpret a work of art, any more than we can expect everyone to adopt what ought to be the scientist’s wonderment toward the admirableness of the universe. What is at stake is our growing collective ability to do so. Peirce writes:

Tell me, upon sufficient authority, that all cerebation depends upon movements of neurites that strictly obey certain physical laws, and that thus all expressions of thought, both external and internal, receive a physical explanation, and I shall be ready to believe you. But if you go on to say that this explodes the theory that my neighbor and myself are governed by reason, and are thinking beings, I must frankly say that it will not give me a high opinion of your intelligence. (EP 2, 439)

Just as the ability to conceive of the universe as the unfolding of an argument grows with each new scientific discovery, so too does our ability to contemplate works of art with each new *interpretation* of them. To develop, cultivate, and nourish the habit of interpreting works of art may, for that reason, appear to be nothing short of cultivating a *taste for signs*. In art, then, men contemplate their contribution to the *summum bonum* by contemplating their own ability to use and interpret signs. A process both modern and contemporary art seems to have incorporated into their own art-making practices.

Peirce believed that the reaches of esthetics were far wider than that of art alone. He therefore resisted any easy identification between the two. This said, however, there should be no doubt — as indeed the quotation used as epigraph to this essay illustrates — that he came to understand the *continuity* that exists between art and science. Peirce, of course, never produced a full-fledged *theory of art* and his direct contributions to the philosophy of art are at best minimal. Yet his writings on esthetics nonetheless indicate a will to *integrate* art into his esthetic concerns. It is the terms of this integration that I have attempted here to unravel from what, in the absence of

a theory of art, seems to be a series of presuppositions and assumptions on Peirce's part. It shows where an esthetic *and* semeiotic theory of art might properly begin its investigations.

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#### Note

<sup>1</sup> I thank Vincent Colapietro and André De Tienne for their kind suggestions and comments.

<sup>2</sup> « Evolutionary Love » in *The Essential Peirce*, vol. 2, Peirce Edition Project (ed.), Bloomington : Indiana University Press, 1998. All citations from Peirce's writings will follow the standard notation: *CP* for *The Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce*, followed by volume, n, and paragraph, m, *The Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce*, 8 vols. vols. 1-6 C. Hartshorne and P. Weiss (eds.) (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1931-35), vols. 7-8 A. Burks (ed.), (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1958); *EP* for the *Essential Peirce*, vol. 2, followed by volume number and page; and *NEM* for *New Elements of Mathematics*, followed by volume and page number, *New Elements of Mathematics*, 4 vols., Carolyn Eisele (ed.), Mouton Publishers, The Hague, Netherlands, 1976.

<sup>3</sup> For simplicity's sake I shall henceforth use Peirce's spelling, "esthetics", rather than the now more common "aesthetics."

<sup>4</sup> Hegel, G. W. F., *Aesthetics. Lectures of Fine Art*, vol. 1, trans. T. M. Knox, Oxford: Clarendon Press, p. 1.

<sup>5</sup> See Beverley Kent's book, *Charles S. Peirce. Logic and the Classification of the Sciences*, Kingston and Montréal, McGill-Queen's University Press, 1987.

<sup>6</sup> In the same "Categorical" spirit, Peirce explains that phaneroscopy requires the mathematical concepts of monadicity, dyadicity, and triadicity so as to apply them — through the Categories — to all that which "appears."

<sup>7</sup> Peirce explains that "all inhibition of action, or action upon action, involves reaction and duality. All self-control involves, and chiefly consists in, inhibition. All direction toward an end or good supposes self-control; and thus the normative sciences are thoroughly infused with duality." In "The Basis of Pragmaticism in the Normative Sciences » in *EP* 2, p. 385.

<sup>8</sup> Vincent Colapietro has justly pointed out to me that although the *summum bonum* must initially be considered in its Firstness, its Secondness and its Thirdness are no less important in accounting for it. In its Secondness, the *summum bonum* acquires a "critical function" which, whenever it enables one to either correct or pursue a tendency in feeling, action or thought, energetically exhibits a form of alterity with regards to them. This is an inhibiting or instigating force that helps rational agents become more rational still. In its Thirdness the *summum bonum* is the habit that our habits of feeling, conduct, and thought must embody, thus ensuring mediation between feeling and conduct.

<sup>9</sup> See "The Basis of Pragmaticism in the Normative Sciences" in *EP* 2, p. 379.

<sup>10</sup> This is not the Pure Chance of the Universe's origins since it is constrained by final causality and by its recursive application of the law of mind.



<sup>11</sup> This process of “narrowing” possible hypotheses as a form of self-control is an important aspect of the rationality of abduction. Abduction, for Peirce, is *not synonymous with unbridled imagination*. As he wrote in his Carnegie Foundation application of 1902: Of [the] three classes of reasonings Abduction is the lowest. So long as it is sincere, and if it be not, it does not deserve to be called reasoning, Abduction cannot be absolutely bad. For sincere efforts to reach the truth, no matter in how wrong a way they may be commenced, cannot fail ultimately to attain any truth that is attainable. Consequently, there is only a relative preference between different abductions; and the ground of such preference must be economical. That is to say, the better abduction is the one which is likely to lead to the truth with the lesser expenditure of time, vitality, etc.” (NEM 4, pp.37-38). The implication here is that there exists a minimal form of self-control in abduction that enables distinguishing between different hypotheses and thus explains the rationality of this form of reasoning. There is more, however, if one considers abduction from the perspective of agapastic evolution. Indeed, in the agapastic evolution of reason our guesses become *constrained* — if only infinitesimally — as chance diminishes. This means that, theoretically, abduction at the beginning of the universe should be more unbridled than abduction at the moment just prior the universe’s eventual crystallization as law. In short, the tendency exhibited by the universe to grow in reasonableness and diminish the role of chance also affects abduction.

<sup>12</sup> Douglas R. Anderson, *Creativity and the Philosophy of C. S. Peirce*, Dordrecht : Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1987.

<sup>13</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, translated with Introduction and Notes by J.H. Bernard (2nd ed. revised), London: Macmillan, 1914.

<sup>14</sup> Reproduced below is the passage in its entirety — as we shall see, it is such as to warrant a brief commentary afterward :

“In the light of the doctrine of categories I should say that an object, to be esthetically good, must have a multitude of parts so related to one another as to impart a positive simple immediate quality to their totality; and whatever does this is, in so far, esthetically good, no matter what the particular quality of the total may be. If that quality be such as to nauseate us, to scare us, or otherwise to disturb us to the point of throwing us out of the mood of esthetic enjoyment, out of the mood of simply contemplating the embodiment of the quality — just, for example, as the Alps affected the people of old times, when the state of civilization was such that an impression of great power was inseparably associated with lively apprehension and terror — then the object remains none the less esthetically good, although people in our condition are incapacitated from a calm esthetic contemplation of it.

This suggestion must go for what it may be worth, which I dare say may be very little. If it be correct, it will follow that there is no such thing as positive esthetic badness; and since by goodness we chiefly in this discussion mean merely the absence of badness, or faultlessness, there will be no such thing as esthetic goodness. All there will be will be various esthetic qualities; that is, simple qualities of totalities not capable of full embodiment in the parts, which qualities may be more decided and strong in one case than in another. But the very reduction of the intensity may be an esthetic quality; nay, it will be so; and I am seriously inclined to doubt there being any distinction of pure esthetic betterness and worseness. My notion would be that there are innumerable varieties of esthetic quality, but no purely esthetic grade of excellence.” (EP 2, pp. 201-202)

At first glance we may be struck by how this passage seems to contradict another passage, quoted earlier, where Peirce claims that "it would be the height of stupidity to say that esthetics knows no good and bad". Since the latter quote is taken from a later essay — a 1906 manuscript for an article Peirce had planned to publish in *The Monist* entitled "The Basis of Pragmaticism in the Normative Sciences" — it might be tempting to infer that he had merely changed his mind during the intervening years. But is this really the case? Is Peirce really contradicting himself here? I don't think so. In fact, I believe that both remarks bear to some extent on different objects. In the Harvard lecture, Peirce is still hesitant in affirming the existence of esthetics as a normative science. Of esthetics, he writes: "I am enclined to think that there is such a normative science; but I feel by no means sure even of that" (*EP* 2, p. 200). Yet, for one who surmises its existence, "esthetics considers those things whose ends are to *embody* qualities of feeling" (*Ibid.* Emphasis mine). In "The Basis of Pragmaticism in the Normative Sciences" Peirce, we saw earlier, offers more precision when he writes that esthetics is "the theory of the *deliberate* formation of [...] habits of feeling" (*EP* 2, p. 378. Emphasis mine). Now, the point I wish to make is this: since, according to the categorial architectonic, *deliberate embodiment* of qualities of feeling *can only happen through the mediation of habits of feeling*, the later essay merely appears to be drawing the necessary conclusion of the views presented in the Harvard lecture three years earlier. In short: it is one thing for *qualities of feeling* to know neither good nor bad, but quite another for the *deliberate formation of habits of feeling* to know esthetic goodness or badness. For deliberateness implies some degree of self-control, and therefore Secondness (as is implied with esthetics being a normative science). That Peirce didn't draw this conclusion in his Harvard lecture may appear surprising, yet the idea of there being no degree of esthetic excellence with regards to qualities of feeling is entirely congruent with his theory of the categories *and* with the perspective he adopts in 1906 for his projected *Monist* article.

<sup>15</sup> See "A Neglected Argument for the Reality of God", in *EP* 2, p.435.

<sup>16</sup> Friedrich Schelling, *Philosophy of Art*, edited, translated and introduced by Douglas W. Stott, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989: §21.

<sup>17</sup> See « Sundry Logical Conceptions » and « Nomenclature and Divisions of Triadic Relations, As Far As They Are Determined » in *EP* 2.

## Ritmi d'autunno e damigelle d'onore: iconismo, ipoicone e altro

A rileggersi Eco[1997] viene davvero da domandarsi come la critica semiotica abbia potuto perdersi tanto a lungo nel discutere di icone, identificando nelle icone le raffigurazioni visive. Eco chiarisce molto bene, infatti, quello che avrebbe potuto essere chiaro già da molto più tempo, ovvero non solo che l'iconismo non ha, per Peirce, più a che fare con le immagini che con altri tipi di raffigurazioni (sonore, tattili, concettuali...), ma anche che il concetto di icona è per Peirce assai più astratto di quanto la vulgata ci abbia trasmesso. Nel caso, per riferirci alle raffigurazioni visive, sarà opportuno utilizzare semmai, come fa Peirce, il termine *ipoicone*.

Già nell'indispensabile lettura di Peirce che fa Proni[1990] è chiaro che l'iconismo è un generale fenomeno percettivo che agisce a livello di Primità. In altre parole, i segni iconici, in sé, non possono che esprimere semplici qualità irrelate, semplici *feeling*. In questo sono comunque il punto di partenza dei segni indicali, ma sono ben difficilmente identificabili con qualcosa di autonomamente comunicativo – tanto meno con le raffigurazioni.

Sono segni perché per Peirce tutto ciò che arriva alla percezione è segno<sup>1</sup>. Tuttavia, in quanto Primità, non possono stare per altro, e stanno al massimo per se stessi – anche se costituiscono la base percettiva di qualsiasi *stare per altro*.

È da qui che vorrei partire per cercare di caratterizzare le differenze nei modi di significazione tra le immagini percettive del mondo reale (d'ora in poi, semplicemente, *immagini*) e le raffigurazioni visive, o *ipoicone*. Mi occuperò principalmente di visivo non tanto perché ritenga che la visione abbia uno statuto particolare rispetto al problema dell'iconismo, ma perché mi interessa cercare di applicare le distinzioni che svilupperò all'analisi delle produzioni estetiche visive, figurative e non. Non eviterò, tuttavia, riferimenti anche a produzioni estetiche afferenti a domini sensoriali diversi.

Voglio parlare di immagini, ma è importante chiarire che nell'ambito di queste pagine non intendo *immagine* come sinonimo di *raffigurazione visiva*, bensì, assai più in generale, come tutto ciò che si presenta alla nostra vista. Dal punto di vista puramente visivo, quindi, il mondo intorno a me è fatto di immagini (interpretabili su due o tre dimensioni, in movimento o statiche), e alcune di queste immagini sono talvolta anche raffigurazioni, cioè ipoicone, immagini che stanno per altre immagini.

Dal punto di vista complessivamente percettivo, tuttavia, il mondo attorno a me non è fatto di immagini, bensì di entità e di eventi, ovvero di qualcosa o qualcuno insieme con cui, per mezzo di cui, su cui... io posso fare qualcosa, o qualcuno o qualcos'altro

può fare qualcosa a me o ad altri o a qualche altro qualcosa. Queste entità ed eventi non sono percepibili nella loro totalità: ne percepiamo degli aspetti visivi, uditivi ecc. e inferiamo altri aspetti, sulla base della nostra esperienza.

Per esempio, se vedo qualcosa che riconosco come l'immagine del mio amico Stefano, inferirò normalmente di avere davanti egli stesso, e di conseguenza mi aspetterò il manifestarsi di altri aspetti percettivi che sono legati a lui, per l'esperienza che ne ho avuto in precedenza. Mi aspetterò dunque che altre percezioni visive a venire, diverse da quella iniziale che mi ha permesso di riconoscerlo, corrispondano a ciò che mi aspetto, e dunque che egli mostri un certo profilo, un certo andamento motorio, un certo tipo di pelle (che a distanza non ero ancora in grado di distinguere); e mi aspetterò pure che la sua voce, il suo odore, il suo modo di parlare, il tocco della sua mano, il suo andamento discorsivo ecc. corrispondano a quelli che so.

Insomma, l'immagine di Stefano agisce rimandando a Stefano come totalità percettiva potenziale secondo il principio della parte per il tutto. Se il riconoscimento dell'immagine *in quanto tale* può essere considerato un fenomeno iconico, già il riconoscimento dell'immagine *come immagine di Stefano* è un fenomeno indicale: la percezione dell'immagine di Stefano mi *indica* che Stefano è qui, e può manifestarsi anche attraverso altre qualità, che confermeranno via via sempre più la validità della mia ipotesi.

Se invece di trovarmi di fronte a Stefano, mi trovo però di fronte a una sua raffigurazione, non troverò questi ulteriori indizi (indici) a confermare la mia ipotesi. Saranno presenti piuttosto altri e differenti indizi, che sono quelli tipici della presenza di raffigurazioni: un supporto piatto, la mancanza di movimento, l'assenza di interazione con il mio comportamento, ecc. Riconosco dunque ugualmente Stefano a partire dalla sua immagine secondo il principio indicale della parte per il tutto – esattamente come nel caso dell'immagine reale – ma riconosco anche che Stefano non è davvero presente, e che sono di fronte a una raffigurazione, ovvero a una figurazione in assenza, uno stimolo surrogato (per dirla con Eco). Nel momento in cui so di trovarmi di fronte a una raffigurazione non mi aspetto più che si manifestino altre proprietà percettive di Stefano, e non mi stupisco se lui non mi viene incontro sorridendo.

Si noti – di passaggio – che il riconoscimento di un'immagine come raffigurazione non comporta l'assenza di qualsiasi altra qualità, oltre a quelle che mi hanno permesso il riconoscimento. Vi sono raffigurazioni più povere di qualità ulteriori (un disegno a matita, per esempio) e raffigurazioni più ricche (una fotografia, una riproduzione tridimensionale a colori, una ripresa televisiva, l'immagine in videoconferenza in tempo reale): nel caso di queste ultime so di potermi aspettare ulteriori conferme percettive alla mia ipotesi di riconoscimento, mentre con le raffigurazioni più povere

ho già sfruttato tutti gli elementi percettivi a disposizione. Ma in tutti i casi, poveri o ricchi che siano, so che esistono delle qualità dell'entità Stefano che la raffigurazione non ha modo di possedere. Il giorno che le nostre capacità tecniche ci mettessero in grado di costruire simulacri indistinguibili dall'originale, probabilmente il nostro concetto di identità personale andrebbe abbastanza rivisto – oppure, con un esempio più banale: il simulacro di un oggetto che ne riproduce le qualità al punto di essere indistinguibile dall'oggetto stesso non ne è più un simulacro; è piuttosto un'altra istanza dell'oggetto stesso, o al massimo una copia, se il principio dell'unicità è pertinente.

Si noti che il rinvio indicale *parte per il tutto* comporta che il rinviate sia in qualche modo parte del rinviato. L'immagine è parte dell'entità (o dell'evento) di cui è immagine.

Analizziamo meglio, dunque, che cosa succede in quei casi in cui il *tutto* non è effettivamente presente, perché l'immagine è una raffigurazione, un'ipoicona. Nella misura in cui in un'immagine riconosco la presenza di un'ipoicona, riconoscerò anche che le sue caratteristiche visive delineano le caratteristiche visive di un'entità (o di un evento) che non è presente lì. L'ipoicona continua dunque a comportarsi come un indice anche in assenza, ma è un indice che mi dice “guarda là”, puntando a qualcosa che può anche trovarsi lontano nel tempo, nello spazio o nella fantasia; al contrario, nell'immagine percettiva l'indice mi dice “guarda qui”, e mi invita a prestare attenzione anche con gli altri sensi a ciò che ho di fronte.

Nel caso dell'immagine, inoltre, l'entità o evento rinvitato potrebbe non essere ancora ben concettualizzato, e ciò che sto percependo visivamente in questo momento finirà inevitabilmente per far parte della concettualizzazione stessa. Un'ipoicona è invece tale solo se il suo rinviato è già di per sé riconoscibile, e dunque si tratta di un'entità o evento già concettualizzato. Per esempio, se guardo un disegno che raffigura l'anatomia di un ornitorinco, posso riconoscere qualcosa come un organo interno dell'animale, anche se non sono in grado di dire di quale organo si tratti; ma potrei anche decidere che quell'insieme irrecognoscibile di linee fa parte del tratteggio per rendere le ombre, oppure che è un effetto gestaltico a partire da linee che appartengono a forme diverse, oppure che è una macchia d'inchiostro della stampa. Potrei insomma interpretare quelle forme al livello dell'immagine e non dell'ipoicona, se non sono in grado di dare loro un senso pertinente al raffigurato.

In altre parole, non si possono raffigurare cose che non siano note, almeno a qualche livello di astrazione, perché per riconoscerle dobbiamo già conoscerle. Un dipinto astratto, come vedremo meglio più avanti, non è la raffigurazione di un mondo reale ma alieno: semplicemente, non è una raffigurazione. Quello che si può fare (e

generalmente viene fatto) è invece raffigurare cose note e quindi riconoscibili, le quali a loro volta ci permettono di ricostruire concettualmente una situazione che nel complesso non è ancora concettualizzata. Un buon dipinto, né più né meno che un buon romanzo, costruisce per noi un mondo ignoto con elementi noti, fornendoci elementi tali per cui possiamo capire la situazione (farcene un concetto) *un po' come se fossimo lì*. La componente ipoiconica si limita a farci riconoscere il già noto, mentre i riconoscimenti più azzardati (quelli che comportano il formarsi di nuovi concetti) vengono eseguiti sull'immagine raffigurata come se fosse l'immagine reale – sempre, però, con il beneficio del dubbio che si possa trattare di qualcosa che debba essere interpretato a livello dell'immagine raffigurante (come nell'esempio della forma incerta nel disegno sull'anatomia dell'ornitorinco).

In alcuni casi, tuttavia ci permettiamo di compiere riconoscimenti creativi al livello degli oggetti in una ipoicona; quando questo avviene le stiamo di fatto attribuendo uno statuto speciale: quello di *protesi*<sup>2</sup>. È un fatto normale che si consideri la televisione (nel senso etimologico del nome) come uno strumento che serve per vedere qualcosa che è lontano da noi. Potremmo, nella medesima prospettiva, considerare la fotografia come una protesi che ci permette di vedere cose che sono a noi lontane sia nello spazio che nel tempo, proprio come le vedremmo dal punto di vista spaziale e temporale da cui l'immagine è stata presa. Il procedimento tecnico costituisce la garanzia dell'attendibilità di TV e foto. Ma in tutti i casi in cui non possiamo fare affidamento sulla perfezione di tale processo, la protesi stessa diventa meno attendibile; e ci troviamo nuovamente nel caso precedente, ovvero nell'incapacità di decidere se i segni difficilmente decifrabili debbano essere interpretati al livello dell'immagine o del rinviato dell'ipoicona.

Come vedremo meglio più sotto, se non riconosciamo gli elementi di base (gli oggetti) non è che non abbiamo possibilità di interpretare l'immagine. Semmai, più semplicemente, non abbiamo modo di intenderla come un'ipoicona – proprio come accade con la pittura non figurativa. Dobbiamo perciò seguire altre strade.

Il rinviato di un'ipoicona non protetica è dunque un'entità già concettualizzata, e quindi è certamente a sua volta un segno, sicuramente almeno indicale (cioè almeno una parte che rinvia al proprio tutto); oltre a questo, può talvolta essere un simbolo. A questo proposito, vale la pena di osservare che in Peirce la relazione simbolica cresce sempre sopra una relazione di tipo indicale<sup>3</sup>: una parte (il *token*) viene riconosciuta come parte di un tutto ideale astratto (il *type*), che può però manifestarsi anche attraverso *token* differenti; ma è il *type*, poi, a rinviare in quanto simbolo. La raffigurazione non interferisce con questo. Sia che l'indicalità di base sia reale (cioè presente in un'immagine percettiva) o che sia mediata da una raffigurazione (cioè

ipoiconica), l'eventuale significazione simbolica emerge nel medesimo modo. Una parola scritta in un libro vero significa infatti secondo le medesime modalità con cui la stessa parola significa in un libro riprodotto in un dipinto, fatti salvi i limiti percettivi che l'essere dipinto comporta (come il non poter sfogliare le pagine del libro, e dunque il non poter vedere la parola in un contesto più ampio). La croce è simbolo del cristianesimo sia che essa sia reale sia che si trovi raffigurata. E non è possibile dire se una croce che si trovi all'interno di un gruppo scultoreo sia una croce reale o una croce raffigurata: è evidentemente entrambe le cose, e il suo significato non deriva dal suo essere l'una anziché l'altra.

È importante non trascurare il fatto che una raffigurazione è sempre anche un'immagine, ovvero che insieme a ciò che è raffigurato noi vediamo anche direttamente ciò che sta sotto i nostri occhi, ovvero la tela dipinta, la carta disegnata, il marmo scolpito, il video illuminato. Questo significa che in qualsiasi raffigurazione agiscono sempre almeno tre livelli di senso:

1. *l'aspetto indicale dell'immagine in quanto tale*, ovvero i meccanismi di rinvio parte per il tutto del rinviante, cioè dell'immagine come se non fosse una raffigurazione: la bidimensionalità dei supporti (tela, carta, schermo...), per esempio, è una componente comunicativa cruciale di tante produzioni visive;
2. *l'aspetto stesso di raffigurazione*, ovvero i meccanismi di rinvio ad altro, basati a loro volta su
3. *la riconoscibilità del rinviato*, ovvero la possibilità di avere un rinvio parte per il tutto a livello del rinviato; che comporta a sua volta la possibilità di riconoscimenti creativi all'interno del mondo rinviato.

Si noti che questi tre livelli sono parte della stessa idea di raffigurazione: infatti, se non si riconosce in senso puramente indicale il rinviato (punto 3), e al contempo non si riconosce in senso puramente indicale il rinviante (punto 1) e non si vede la differenza tra i due riconoscimenti paralleli, non si può cogliere la natura di raffigurazione dell'immagine (punto 2).

Possiamo perciò dire che riconosciamo la presenza di un'ipoicona quando la medesima immagine stimola contemporaneamente due riconoscimenti percettivi differenti, ciascuno di tipo indicale (*pars pro toto*), e uno dei due viene visto come veicolo (a sua volta indicale, ma non del tipo *pars pro toto*) dell'altro, il quale, a sua volta, è considerato virtuale, fittizio.

È importante osservare che non è necessario mettere in gioco intenzionalità comunicative (e la conseguente tematica dell'enunciazione) perché si abbiano fenomeni di questo tipo. Riconoscere figure nelle nuvole risponde ai requisiti elencati, senza che

si abbia produzione intenzionale di quelle raffigurazioni. In una nuvola a forma di pecora vediamo sia la nuvola che la pecora, e vediamo anche che la nuvola *indica* la pecora, nel senso che ci invita a vederla attraverso la propria conformazione.

La raffigurazione è dunque un fenomeno naturale, che si produce ogni volta che una percezione visiva (o d'altro tipo) indica la presenza di qualcosa che non può essere veramente presente lì, perché altri aspetti di quella medesima percezione lo rendono impossibile.

È però questa natura intimamente complessa della raffigurazione a renderla un ottimo candidato alla trasmissione di discorsi non verbali. Un'immagine che sia contemporaneamente se stessa e anche altro potrà giocare, per costruire il proprio discorso, su entrambi i piani e sulla relazione tra loro, nonché sulla consapevolezza da parte del fruitore che tutto ciò che vede è stato prodotto per essere interpretato come comunicazione – e non come un semplice segno del mondo.

Eco[1997] cita al proposito i *Salon* di Diderot, e dice:

Il fatto che – anche se non sappiamo esattamente come funzionano – ci siano stimoli surrogati, viene esemplificato splendidamente dalle pagine che Diderot scrive su Chardin (*Salon de 1763*): “L’artista ha posto su una tavola un vaso di vecchia porcellana di Cina, due biscotti, un boccale pieno di olive, una *corbeille* di frutta, due bicchieri pieni a metà di vino, una arancia amara e un *pâté*. Per guardare i quadri degli altri sembra che io abbia bisogno di farmi degli occhi; per vedere quelli di Chardin, non ho che da conservare gli occhi che la natura mi ha dato, e servirmene bene... È che questo vaso di porcellana è porcellana; che queste olive sono realmente separate dall’occhio dall’acqua nella quale galleggiano; è che non c’è che da aprire questa arancia e spremere la, questo bicchiere di vino e berlo, questi frutti e sbucciarli, questo *pâté* e immergervi il coltello... O Chardin, non è del bianco, del rosso, del nero che tu stendi sulla tua tavolozza; è la sostanza stessa degli oggetti, sono l’aria e la luce che tu cogli con la punta del tuo pennello e poni sulla tela”.

A prima vista l’elogio di Diderot esprime il giubilo di uno spettatore che, ritenendo che ci possa essere pittura assolutamente realistica, si trova davanti a un capolavoro del realismo, in cui non esiste alcuno scarto tra stimolo che possa provenire dall’oggetto reale e stimolo “surrogato”. Ma Diderot non è così ingenuo. Passato il primo effetto, ben sapendo che quello che vede non sono frutti e biscotti reali, sembra avvicinarsi al quadro, scoprendosi presbite: “Non si riesce a capire questa magia. Sono strati spessi di colore, applicati gli uni sugli altri, il cui effetto traspira dal profondo alla superficie. Altre volte si direbbe che è un vapore che è stato soffiato sulla tela; altre volte ancora, che vi sia stata sparsa una schiuma leggera... Avvicinatevi,



tutto si confonde, si appiattisce e scompare. Allontanatevi di nuovo, tutto si ricrea e si riproduce”.

Il brano di Diderot su Chardin citato da Eco è rivelatore. Il fascino del dipinto di Chardin sta (anche) nella relazione tra quello che si vede a distanza (quando si impongono le gestalt percettive del raffigurato) e quello che si vede da vicino (quando si impongono quelle dell'immagine in quanto tale). Il virtuosismo del pittore figurativo sta nella sua capacità di costruire un'illusione di realtà attraverso il colore distribuito sulla tela: per molti fruitori ingenui questa capacità è una ragione di interesse sufficiente nei confronti del dipinto. La magia del costruire un'immagine rimandata che sia percettivamente più forte di quella davvero presente ai nostri occhi non è mai irrilevante nell'apprezzamento di un'opera d'arte visiva, anche quando siamo consapevoli che non ci si può fermare lì.

Ed evidentemente non ci si può fermare a questo primo livello di interpretazione. Sappiamo quanto inchiostro è stato steso nei secoli per discutere sulla situazione raffigurata dal capolavoro di Velázquez, *Las meninas* (*Le damigelle d'onore*). Quando si discute sull'organizzazione spaziale, sulle relazioni tra i personaggi raffigurati, sul perché ci sono degli specchi e stanno proprio lì dove stanno, si sta discutendo del mondo che il dipinto mette in scena, ovvero del mondo raffigurato.

*Las meninas* invita a fare ipotesi su questo mondo, e indubbiamente buona parte del suo fascino è dovuto alla complessità del mondo raffigurato. Noi riconosciamo figure umane in relazione tra loro, e cerchiamo, a partire da questo, di inferire i dettagli di una situazione spaziale e psicologica intricata e affascinante, come se fossimo lì. Si tratta di un secondo livello di interpretazione, in cui a essere oggetto di apprezzamento estetico non è solo la capacità del pittore di produrre l'illusione del reale, ma anche la natura di questo reale raffigurato. Che nell'economia di *Las meninas* questa seconda dimensione sia di grande importanza viene messo in evidenza anche dal lavoro di Pablo Picasso, che, tre secoli dopo Velázquez, ha prodotto una serie di variazioni sul suo dipinto, in cui ciò che viene conservato è proprio il mondo raffigurato – mentre cambia radicalmente, e in tanti modi diversi, il modo di raffigurarlo.

Sono convinto che l'interesse di *Las meninas* non si esaurisca nemmeno qui, ma non vi è dubbio che si tratti di un'opera in cui la situazione raffigurata (anzi, più specificamente, *raccontata* attraverso la raffigurazione dei suoi personaggi e delle relazioni tra loro) è di profondo interesse. Tantissimi dipinti non meno famosi, e non meno degni di interesse di questo, raffigurano situazioni assai meno interessanti.

Osserviamo la natura morta di Francisco de Zurbarán in figura 2. Si tratta di un dipinto di altissima qualità, ma il mondo che vi è raffigurato è così semplice e povero

di interesse in sé che il valore del dipinto non può derivare da questo, se non in misura molto ridotta. Inoltre, questa raffigurazione non racconta nessuna storia; o meglio, racconta una storia così banale (*ci sono tre vasi di coccio su un ripiano*) da non poter costituire ragione di interesse in sé.

Per apprezzare questo dipinto, il fruitore deve dunque o fermarsi al primo livello (quello del virtuosismo figurativo), e magari considerare l'opera come pura decorazione, cioè come qualcosa che non veicola un discorso autonomo, ma è fatta per costituire un tassello di un discorso altrui, come quello di un arredatore, per esempio. Oppure, auspicabilmente, deve passare a un terzo livello di interpretazione, quello in cui si considera l'immagine rinviante in quanto tale, a prescindere dalla relazione con l'immagine raffigurata. In altre parole, il fruitore deve passare a valutare quegli aspetti che la tradizione semiotica recente chiama gli aspetti *plastici* dell'immagine.

Nella prospettiva che stiamo esponendo in queste pagine, gli aspetti plastici sono gli aspetti dell'immagine considerata in quanto tale, e non in quanto raffigurazione<sup>4</sup>. Questo è coerente con l'opposizione standard della semiotica generativa, che contrappone il *plastico* al *figurativo*. Gli aspetti plastici sono dunque ciò che caratterizza l'immagine e non l'ipoicona, e quindi sono ciò che caratterizza il reale non meno che le immagini prodotte – anche se, indubbiamente, nelle immagini prodotte gli aspetti plastici sono componenti del discorso dell'enunciante.

Evidentemente, la valutazione degli aspetti plastici dell'immagine non può che essere fatta per comparazione con altre immagini del mondo, e l'individuazione di somiglianze può esserne una componente importante. Si noti che la presenza di somiglianze non comporta affatto che ci troviamo di fronte a un qualche tipo di raffigurazione: nessuno può dubitare del fatto che due gemelli omozigoti si assomiglino profondamente, ma bisogna trovarsi in circostanze molto particolari perché abbia senso dire che uno *raffigura* l'altro. Normalmente queste circostanze non si danno, e la somiglianza non comporta la raffigurazione.

Eco[1997] ha ragione anche nel dire che non è necessario scomodare il concetto di similarità per spiegare la somiglianza. Vi è piuttosto, diremo noi, un qualche tipo di *identità percettiva*, per esempio, tra una figura umana reale e una raffigurata, visto che le riconosciamo esattamente nel medesimo modo – anche se poi, contestualmente, riconosciamo pure altri aspetti che ce le fanno interpretare rispettivamente come mondo reale o come raffigurazione. Come ancora ci ricorda Eco, per Peirce il riconoscimento è qualcosa di primitivo; è l'iconicità stessa. Ma già non è più primitivo il *riconoscere come qualcosa* (o qualcuno), che comporta il passaggio da una parte al tutto, dal *token* al *type*, ovvero un processo già di tipo indicale.<sup>5</sup>

Se ora torniamo a osservare *Las meninas* con questo tipo di sguardo, ci possiamo accorgere, per esempio, che la disposizione delle figure sul piano dell'immagine permette meccanismi di sottolineatura, accostamento, opposizione, che sono del tutto indipendenti da quelli messi in gioco dalla ricostruzione del mondo raffigurato. Questi effetti riguardano le figure dipinte e non quelle raffigurate. Un quarto livello di interpretazione diventa così immediatamente possibile ora, nel momento in cui queste sottolineature, accostamenti, opposizioni possono essere a loro volta accostati e contrapposti a quelli del secondo livello. Questo quarto livello può costituire ragione di sufficiente soddisfazione estetica per molti fruitori meno ingenui di quelli che si fermano al primo o al secondo – ma a sua volta non esaurisce affatto l'interpretazione dell'opera.

Per esempio, le qualità specifiche dell'immagine in quanto tale possono essere considerate come indizio (e perciò indice) del suo processo di produzione da parte del pittore. Osservare i dettagli di *Las meninas* mi permette di capire il percorso della mano di Velázquez, e questo a sua volta mi permette di operare inferenze sui suoi percorsi emotivi e intellettuali. Oppure, elementi simbolici presenti nell'immagine possono aggiungere elementi di significato che vanno combinati con gli altri – come accade con l'onorificenza a forma di croce che si trova sul petto del pittore, e che la vulgata vuole sia stata aggiunta dal re in persona, rendendola così non solo un'onorificenza raffigurata, ma una vera e reale.

Nei dipinti di William Turner il raffigurato è spesso ai limiti o oltre i limiti del riconoscibile. Talvolta è riconoscibile solo grazie al titolo dell'opera. Grazie a questa difficoltà di riconoscimento, la componente di immagine (plastica) di questi quadri può ritrovarsi talmente importante da essere considerata dominante rispetto a quella figurativa – come si vede se compariamo certi dipinti di Turner con le opere, informali e dichiaratamente non figurative, di Mark Rotchko. Tuttavia sappiamo bene come nella poetica del romantico Turner l'idea di pittura non figurativa non fosse davvero contemplata; e il suo gioco artistico stava evidentemente anche nel virtuosismo del *nascondere* il raffigurato nell'immagine, in modo tale che fosse la sua nominazione a renderlo di colpo evidente.

La raffigurazione in Turner non arriva quindi a essere assente, ma diventa piuttosto un momento importante (quasi un colpo di scena) di un percorso in qualche modo *teatrale*, che ha per protagonista l'occhio dello spettatore. Il dipinto è costruito in modo da palesarsi inizialmente come semplice immagine; ma poiché lo spettatore sa che esso non può limitarsi a essere tale, e che un elemento di raffigurazione deve necessariamente essere presente, lo cercherà con impegno, e alla fine lo troverà.

Nel frattempo, però, gli elementi plastici dell'immagine hanno agito su di lui più di quanto non accadesse in qualsiasi pittura precedente – e la strada è stata aperta, storicamente, a quei discorsi visivi che potranno in seguito fare a meno del tutto della componente figurativa.

Ci vogliono ancora parecchi decenni, tuttavia, e le conseguenze tardive di un'estetica di origine romantica che vede nell'astrazione musicale il modello dell'arte, affinché Wassilij Kandinsky compia il passo decisivo nella cosiddetta pittura astratta. Non meno di quella di Turner (anche se su temi e con modalità differenti) la pittura di Kandinsky è una pittura del sublime. Proprio come Turner, Kandinsky arriva a nascondere la figurazione all'interno dell'immagine, fino ad accorgersi un bel giorno, quasi improvvisamente, che in realtà di quella figurazione egli non ha affatto bisogno, e che la pittura può condurre il proprio discorso visivo senza nessun bisogno della figurazione.

L'intuizione di Kandinsky è corretta e proficua, ma la sua pittura non abbandonerà mai del tutto, in realtà, l'idea di raffigurazione. A ben guardare, infatti, se nei dipinti astratti di Kandinsky è difficile vedere figurazioni del mondo reale, questa visione non è impossibile. È difficile dire *che cosa* le forme presenti nei suoi dipinti raffigurino, ma è sempre piuttosto evidente che raffigurano *qualcosa*, per quanto questo *qualcosa* abbia una natura molto astratta.

Tuttavia, mentre le entità riconoscibili nei dipinti sono molto astratte, le relazioni dinamiche che vengono descritte tra loro sono spesso piuttosto realistiche ed evidenti. Queste figure a cui non possiamo dare un nome sono infatti figure che avanzano, indietreggiano, volteggiano, stanno, si fronteggiano reciprocamente, sono in bilico, e così via. Per quanto sia vago e astratto, insomma, un racconto è tipicamente desumibile dai dipinti di Kandinsky: è un racconto in cui soggetti non riconoscibili (se non a un livello di astrazione molto alto) eseguono azioni riconoscibili.

Osserviamo che questa è la situazione speculare rispetto a quella che avevamo descritto poco sopra parlando della natura morta di Zurbarán: in quella vi è raffigurazione (quasi) senza racconto, mentre qui vi è racconto (quasi) senza raffigurazione. Se seguiamo nel tempo il filone che da Zurbarán attraversa Chardin, possiamo arrivare sino a Giorgio Morandi. In Morandi scompare interamente il virtuosismo che entusiasmava Diderot, e la magia dell'operazione visiva sta semmai nel farci ritrovare l'immagine delle cose del mondo raffigurato attraverso l'evidente differenza tra l'immagine che raffigura e quella raffigurata. Sin qui, si tratta di una logica del rivelare piano piano che è imparentata con quella di Turner e del primo Kandinsky. Ma in Morandi non c'è il sublime, e con esso manca quel suo elemento cruciale che è la celebrazione dell'*evento*: di conseguenza, come in Zurbarán, il racconto è (quasi)

assente, mentre, al contrario che in Zurbarán, pure la raffigurazione è piuttosto latitante. Un passo più in là sulla stessa linea, ed ecco che arriviamo a Piet Mondrian, dove sia il racconto che la raffigurazione sono scomparsi del tutto.

È Mondrian dunque a porci per la prima volta un problema radicale: come fa un dipinto a veicolare un discorso, quando ambedue i suoi caposaldi storici (racconto e raffigurazione) sono stati completamente esclusi dal gioco?

La condizione di base perché il discorso visivo di Mondrian funzioni è che lo spettatore sappia già che quello che ha davanti agli occhi è un dipinto, ovvero un discorso visivo. I dipinti hanno storicamente contenuto delle raffigurazioni, che veicolavano discorsi, secondo le modalità descritte sopra. Ora che la figurazione è scomparsa, vi sono comunque dei marcatori che segnalano la natura di discorso visivo dell'immagine, dovuta al suo essere un dipinto.

Il problema interpretativo, per il fruitore ingenuo, è che gli è stato sottratto il primo livello di interpretazione, che è quello del virtuosismo figurativo, e gli è stato sottratto anche il secondo livello, che è quello del racconto (della situazione raffigurata, che nella pittura di Kandinsky appare indebolito, ma non del tutto assente). Gli resta solo il terzo livello, quello plastico, ma senza il conforto del confronto con gli altri due, e quindi senza la possibilità del quarto livello che abbiamo descritto sopra.

Un dipinto di Mondrian, dunque, dovrebbe essere interpretato come una forma del mondo (una semplice immagine, non una ipoicona), se non fosse un dipinto, cioè qualcosa che si pone all'interno di una tradizione di discorsi visivi. Siccome tuttavia lo è, ci ritroviamo costretti a cercare le linee del suo discorso, e a individuare le somiglianze tra le forme di Mondrian e quelle del mondo perché solo da lì, a questo punto, può partire il discorso dell'opera – somiglianze che vanno considerate non in termini di figurazione, ma come somiglianze pure e semplici.

Non ha senso sostenere che *Broadway Boogie-Woogie* raffigura la frenesia di Broadway e del suo jazz, non più di quanto abbia senso sostenere che un gemello raffigura l'altro. Questo dipinto non è dunque, certamente, un'ipoicona. Il rimando, che pure vi è presente, è basato su una similitudine astratta tra la frenesia dei rumori e dei suoni nel jazz e quella dei colori nel dipinto di Mondrian. Senza titolo, questa similitudine non sarebbe coglibile; e anche con l'aiuto del titolo, non la si coglie nello stesso senso in cui si arriva a vedere il paesaggio nei dipinti di Turner.

Come interpreteremo allora dipinti come *Lavender mist* o *Autumn rhythm*, di Jackson Pollock? Se li confrontiamo con i dipinti di Kandinsky, osserveremo che manca in loro qualsiasi riferimento figurativo, anche ad alto livello di astrazione; ma osserveremo anche che qui come là (e a differenza che in Mondrian) è presente moltissimo movimento, e quindi azione, evento, e quindi, in qualche modo, racconto. Ma racconto di che?

Osserviamo con attenzione *Autumn rhythm*. È evidente che non raffigura nulla, ma siccome è un dipinto ci aspettiamo lo stesso che trasmetta un discorso. Questo discorso proverrà solo dalla sua natura di immagine, visto che non c'è nessuna natura ipoiconica a cui fare appello. L'evidenza del suo essere un dipinto è ciò che induce nel fruitore il giusto atteggiamento interpretativo: se infatti le medesime linee si trovassero su un muro o su una parete rocciosa e apparissero come andamenti casuali, presumibilmente chi le vede non si predisporrebbe allo stesso tipo di lavoro interpretativo.

In questo dipinto, le linee rimandano abbastanza chiaramente alle circostanze della loro produzione (anche per questo si parla di *action painting*). Agiscono cioè come indici (indizi) nei confronti di un evento creatore che si presenta come rilevante per la loro interpretazione. In questo senso agiscono sì come parti che rimandano a un tutto, ma il tutto non è un'entità di cui le linee sono componenti visive, bensì un evento di cui le linee sono la traccia, l'effetto, la prova. Pollock ci sta insomma dicendo che un dipinto può comunicare anche per modalità di rinvio diverse da quella ipoiconica.

Il racconto, ovvero l'azione, è presente in questo dipinto non perché sia in qualche modo raffigurato (come accade in Kandinsky), ma perché l'immagine ne è essa stessa indizio. Come nel caso di *Broadway Boogie-Woogie*, si rinvia a un ritmo di movimento (qui richiamato anche nel titolo), ma questo viene fatto mettendo in gioco anche la dimensione produttiva dell'opera stessa.

È possibile che il fascino dei dipinti di Pollock sia legato al loro implicito richiamo ai ritmi dei fenomeni naturali<sup>6</sup>, sia per analogia visiva (come accade anche nel dipinto di Mondrian) sia, in maniera mediata, attraverso il rinvio all'azione produttiva del pittore. Ma in nessun modo possiamo dire che l'immagine *raffigura* questi ritmi naturali; non c'è nessuna raffigurazione in gioco qui.

La nascita dell'astrattismo in pittura coincide con un periodo di grande interesse per l'estetica musicale, anche al di fuori del campo musicologico stretto<sup>7</sup>. L'idea di fondo di Kandinsky e degli altri pittori astrattisti è che se la musica riesce ad affascinare e a produrre emozioni nel fruitore senza l'ausilio della figurazione, perché non deve poterlo fare anche la pittura? Dalla nascita dell'astrattismo in poi, di conseguenza, la pittura inizia ad assomigliare molto di più alla musica, facendoci capire che la forma di rinvio storicamente cruciale (almeno in apparenza), ovvero quella basata sulla figurazione, era *solo una* delle forme di rinvio che costruiscono il discorso pittorico, e non necessariamente la principale. La possiamo eliminare completamente, infatti, senza distruggere la pittura.

La consapevolezza di Kandinsky ci mostra che la problematica dell'immagine è

dunque ben lontana dall'esaurirsi in quella dell'ipoicona, e ha a che fare molto più con le caratteristiche di ciò che Peirce chiama *indici* che non con quelle di ciò che Peirce chiama *icone*. Come Peirce spiegava bene oltre un secolo fa, i segni iconici, in altre parole, non esistono in quanto tali, perché l'iconismo è solo una componente di segni più complessi. I segni che esistono, e che hanno tipicamente componenti iconiche, sono sostanzialmente segni indicali, sopra un certo numero dei quali si innesta talvolta anche il rimando di carattere simbolico.

È interessante osservare che persino la relazione *token-type*, costitutiva dei simboli, è di fatto una relazione indicale<sup>8</sup>, almeno quando si prende in esame il lato interpretativo (contrapposto a quello produttivo) della faccenda. Si produce un simbolo creando un *token* del suo *type*, ma per interpretare un simbolo bisogna identificare un certo percelto come *token* di un certo *type*, dopodiché il *type* potrà essere interpretato simbolicamente. Ma il rimando da *token* a *type* è un processo esattamente dello stesso tipo di quelli che abbiamo analizzato in queste pagine: è un rimando indicale<sup>9</sup>. Il *token* è riconosciuto come manifestazione percepibile di un tutto concettualizzato, di cui esso è quindi parte.

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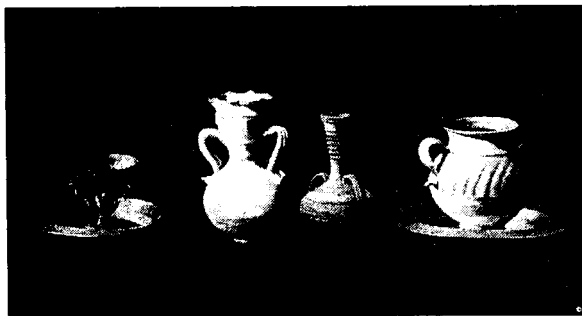
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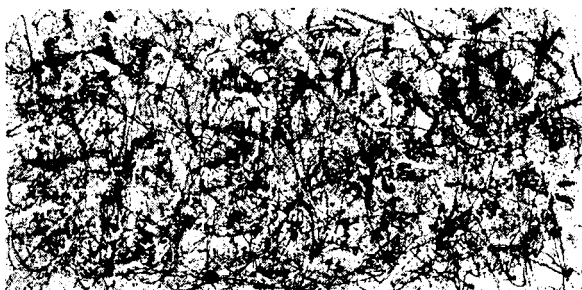
## Figure



1. Diego Velázquez, *Las Meninas*



2. Francisco de Zurbarán, *Natura morta con vasi di ceramica*



3. Jackson Pollock, *Autumn Rhythm*

## Note

<sup>1</sup> Vedi, per esempio, il saggio “Pensiero-segno-uomo” CP 5.264-314, in Peirce [1980].

<sup>2</sup> Vedi, al proposito, Eco[1997].

<sup>3</sup> Vedi al proposito, per esempio, CP 2.249 (l’articolo “Grammatica speculativa”), dove troviamo la seguente affermazione: “Così il Simbolo implicherà una sorta di Indice, sebbene un Indice di tipo peculiare” (Peirce[1980: 140]).

<sup>4</sup> Vedi, su questo, anche Polidoro[2004].

<sup>5</sup> Se la Primità è puro *feeling*, il riconoscimento a livello iconico è un puro imporsi della sensazione, una salienza percettiva (per dirla con Thom[1988]) che non ha ancora gravidanza. Di tutto ciò di cui abbiamo sensazione visiva, *feeling*, solo una parte viene effettivamente riconosciuto come qualcosa, e associato a un concetto (preesistente o creato ad hoc). Il resto non arriva davvero a essere pienamente percepito.

<sup>6</sup> Vedi Taylor[2002].

<sup>7</sup> Vedi, su questo, Rousseau[2003].

<sup>8</sup> Vedi sopra, nota 3.

<sup>9</sup> Vedi su questo anche le pagine del Groupe Mu[1992:97 e segg] e anche Eco[1997].



# Interpreting Radiograms

“It’s an old maxim of mine that  
when you have excluded the  
impossible, whatever remains,  
however improbable, must  
be the truth” -

*The Sign of Four*

## Introduction

Radiograms represent a kind of index, but not an ordinary one. Due to the particular interest of their truth, we will explore the way doctors make sense of them. As Peirce said,

Every man is fully satisfied that there is such a thing as truth, or he would not ask any question. (Harvard Lectures on Pragmatism, CP 5.211, 1903).

We agree to consider truth in this broad and cheap sense: the doctor asks a question to the radiogram. From a pragmatic point of view, medical signs are the key to answer a clinical query and to operate, the meaning of the sign being whatever unitary determination it would impart to practical conduct. As we will see, the relation between interpretation and truth in diagnosis represents a model of induction.

## Radiograms as Imprints

Radiograms are indexes, but how do they work? According to Umberto Eco (1976), the notions of ‘index’, ‘icon’, ‘symbol’ are unsatisfactory because the referent as discriminant parameter is postulated, whereas we are asking how the sign is eventually related to its content. So we will rather use the classification of modes of sign production proposed by Eco.

In this perspective, a radiogram is a kind of *imprint*, in which we search for *symptoms*. In both imprints and symptoms, the expression is ready-made. The content of imprints is the class of all possible imprinters; the content of symptoms is the class of all possible causes, so they are really similar; the inferred cause, proposed by means of abduction, is pure content – it is not an object. The difference between *imprints* and *symptoms* consists in the type/token –ratio, *difficilis* in the first case, *facilis* in the second one<sup>1</sup>. So a doctor must *learn* (1) to recognize that “there is something” in the radiogram thanks to a code motivated by *previous experiences*;

then (2) he must infer “*what this thing could be*”. In medical *metalanguage*, the first activity is called *identification*, the second one *typification*. Diagnosis consists of these two steps<sup>2</sup>. But how does this work?

### A Wrong Model: Barthes

Roland Barthes (1985) proposes a model for diagnosis: the interpreter searches for a certain association of symptoms on the expression plan (syndrome); then he opens a codebook and finds the relative pathology on the content plan. So we have a codebook of metasemiotic statements. A production of any statement will show the form Syndrome → Pathology, or, by *modus ponens*:

$$\begin{array}{c} (E1, E2, E3 \dots) \rightarrow C \\ (E1, E2, E3 \dots) \\ \hline C \end{array}$$

We notice that there is an analogy with the model proposed by Hempel (1962) for the induction in human sciences. But this deductive model does not explain difficulties in diagnosis, uncertainty, and frequent mistakes.

### Another Wrong Model: Hempel

Hempel (1962) formalizes the inductive-statistic explanation in this way:

$$\begin{array}{c} E \\ p(E/C) \\ \hline C \end{array}$$

Where *p* stands for “high probability”. But does this model really work? For example, think to a patient is in a feverish state. He has an X-ray and, as far as the radiologist can see, there is an opacity in the right bronchus. There is a high probability of bronchitis. So we have:

$$\begin{array}{c} E \text{ (Fever + bronchial opacity)} \\ p E=C(\text{bronchitis}) \\ \hline C \end{array}$$

But this can lead to mistakes in diagnosis. We could find a less probable pathology, e.g. a tumour. The aim of diagnosis isn't to determine the probable meaning of a sign. The aim of diagnosis is rather to exclude what a sign could tell us and actually does not.

So the doctor prescribe a drug and a new X-ray after the therapy. After a therapy of fifteen days, as he can see, the opacity disappeared. Now the doctor can exclude the tumour hypothesis.

Recently, Patricia Cheng proposed a new model for measuring causal relationship (see Thagard 1998):

$$\Delta pC = p(E/C) - p(E/-C)$$

It shows the same problem of Hempel's model: probability is not as relevant as exclusion in diagnosis. In our perspective, diagnosis is more similar to a form of *induction by elimination of hypothesis*, well known by Francis Bacon (*Novum organum*, 1620).

### **Induction by Elimination**

Peirce defines "reality" like a good source of *inductions*: he describes the scientific method of fixation of beliefs in these terms:

There are Real things, whose characters are entirely independent of our opinions about them; those Reals affect our senses according to regular laws, and, though our sensations are as different as are our relations to the objects, yet, by taking advantage of the laws of perception, we can ascertain by reasoning how things really and truly are; and any man, if he have sufficient experience and he reason enough about it, will be led to the one True conclusion. (The Fixation of Belief CP 5.384, 1877)

His idea of induction is consequently similar to the definition of probability like degree of confirmation proposed by Carnap<sup>3</sup>. But this definition can't avoid Hempel's paradox of confirmation<sup>4</sup>; furthermore, we still need a model for exclusion in medical diagnosis: we are more interested in the possibilities with a low grade of probability – a low grade of confirmation. After all, as information theory says, the less probable is an event, the more it is informative.

## The Role of *Metalanguage*

If the type/token *ratio* is recognized as *difficilis*, still we have different types of imprints. For example, in certain cases the size of the imprinter determines the size of the imprint: but with fingerprints, size is not a pertinent parameter since they can be correlated to their content even if enormously magnified, as Eco noticed. So, imprints are conventionally coded and the correlation activity implies metasemiotic statements; “the correlation, first proposed as the result of an inference, was then posited”<sup>5</sup>. Let’s see a metasemiotic statement on the relation between pathology and radiological anatomy in CT:

Consolidation:

1. Pathology.- Transudate, exudate, or tissue replacing alveolar air
2. CT – Homogeneous increase in pulmonary parenchimal attenuation that obscures the margin of vessels and airway walls. An air bronchogram may be present.

As we can see, the form of a metasemiotic statement shows that a certain pathological content of the radiogram would involve a certain symptom. So we have not, like in Barthes’s model,  $E \rightarrow C$ . On the contrary, our results indicate that  $C \rightarrow E$ , or, in other terms, the same symptoms can stand for different pathologies. This is the reason why, starting from a particular syndrome, we must exclude some pathologies, or, formalizing exclusion by *modus tollens*:

$$\begin{array}{r} C \rightarrow E \\ \text{not } E \\ \hline \text{not } C \end{array}$$

The general rule  $C \rightarrow E$  is the form of the metasemiotic statements on the relation between expression plan and content plan in radiology.

## Exclusion and Semiotics of Invisible

A problem of our model of induction by elimination is: if a radiogram shows nothing, this does not mean that there is nothing. For instance, our patient had an oesophageal tumour. After chemotherapy the doctor wants to know if he is OK. Imagine that the radiogram, obtained using a normal exposition to X-rays, shows us nothing. The radiologist may ask for a “harder” radiogram obtained using a longer exposure to X-Rays: the first radiogram could be mute only because the exposure was not

sufficient. Now, imagine we can't find anything even in the second radiogram. Now we can exclude other problems, like metastasis. But, again the radiogram could be mute due to a problem of resolution. Then the next step will be a CT. This case reveals the conventional side of indexes; it's an example of visibility-construction. The conventional, constructed side of indexes shows that we simply can't be sure about how things stands in the "reality". Actually, doctors are not interested in the ontological problem about how things really stand in the body: the exam goes on from less invasive techniques to more invasive one like the CT until we have not therapeutic alternative options. When the options reduce to one, there is no meaning in further exams, and it's time to operate. Again, we have another useful application of the maxim of pragmatism:

The true meaning of any product of the intellect lies in whatever unitary determination it would impart to practical conduct under any and every conceivable circumstance, supposing such conduct to be guided by reflexion carried to an ultimate limit ('Additament,' comments on 'Neglected Argument for the Reality of God', CP 6.490, c. 1910).

The only problem is that, again, we are incapable of distinguish between reality and the limits of our point of view on reality<sup>6</sup>. But now we can imagine a synthesis between the model of induction by hypothesis confirmation and the model of induction by exclusion.

For example, a radiogram shows a total opacification of the left pulmonary field with loss of volume and hyper-expansion of the right pulmonary field. We have two hypotheses: (a) the bronchus is obstructed. We can't see the cause of the obstruction. (b) There is a massive pleuric effusion. This is the cause of the opacification (liquid is more radio-opaque than air).

Let's proceed to the exclusion of the second hypothesis: in case of pleural effusion we have a hyperexpansion of the involved pulmonary field and a displacement of the mediastinum to the right. But this is not the case, so the first hypothesis is the most convincing one.

Now we can search for hypothesis confirmation. The next step is a CT, and the CT shows a complete obstruction of the left bronchus with parenchimal consolidation, which appears retracted (pulmonary atelectasis).

## Some Conclusions

The idea of habit or belief as a guide for knowledge and action is not sufficient: as we know from Peirce, the real problem is the scientific method by which we obtain belief fixation. In the case of radiological anatomy, metasemiotic statements provide this guide; and these statements rise from experience thanks to a form of induction by *modus tollens*. Then we can use metasemiotic statements as rules: this implies several exclusions too.

The complexity of these forms of reasoning is not surprising. For example, in his essay "Hume on Miracles" Peirce writes about "abductive induction"; furthermore, 'deductions', 'inductions', 'abductions' are only a model, and thinking is usually more complex than models. In the formal translation of syllogism shaped by George Boole (1854:V) there are several intermediate not-interpretable passages. So, reasoning with models derived from the syllogism excludes correspondency between the process of reasoning and the interpretation of the process.

We saw the role of metasemiotics as a guide to induction; this to avoid the necessity of metaphysical unsatisfactory postulates like Peirce's realism as a background for inductions: definitions in metasemiotics establish precise limits to the interpretative activity. Generally speaking, metasemiotics avoid the necessity of using every time the entire culture as background for our inductions - a problem roused by Marco Santambrogio (1984). Metasemiotics is a good demarcation line between Duhem's thesis and Quine's thesis. In fact, Duhem's holism is relative to a theory, not to entire culture (See Giorello 1994:77). Finally, Metasemiotics is a good model of the local encyclopaedic structure as it is pragmatically constructed from a scientific point of view.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> The relation between *ratio facilis* and *difficilis* is similar to the one between implication and co-implication in logic. See Eco (1984).

<sup>2</sup> On the semiotic categories implied in such a judgement see Galofaro (2005); on the medical report like semiotical translation see Galofaro (2006).

<sup>3</sup> See also: 'A Neglected Argument for the Reality of God (G)', CP 2.756-759, c. 1905.

<sup>4</sup> let's say that every time I see something that is black and it is a raven I confirm that every raven is black. But if every raven is black, then if something is not black then that thing is not a raven. So, every time I see something that is not black (e.g. a red rose) and is not a raven I confirm that every thing is not black is not a raven; so every time I see a red rose I confirm that every raven is black.

<sup>5</sup> See Eco (1976:223)

<sup>6</sup> The wish of docking someday on the port of 'reality' is actually questioned by the incommensurability between different scientific theories, for example between Relativity and Quantum Mechanics. So we cannot swear there's something like a *ultimate logical interpretant*. Peirce postulates realism as a background, but does not prove it's theory.

<sup>7</sup> CP 6.522-547, 1901.

# Peirce and the Image: the Work of Art and the Sign

## Introduction

In the tradition of Peirce's pragmatism this paper attempts to show how Peirce's thought — semiotics, aesthetics and his version of phenomenology — can illuminate and extend the meaning of a work of art. As a practising artist and poet I am interested in the work of art that emerges from Peirce's thought as a mode of *presence* of experience, in particular feeling, rather than a representation of something. Aesthetic theory of the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century could be characterised as a desire to exceed representation, not only to reveal the unseen but to somehow access that which is 'beyond' representation.

In his 1903 Harvard Lectures on Pragmatism, Peirce, writing on Firstness in the Universe, draws an analogy between the Universe and a painting (most probably a seascape by Monet) that points to a radical view of aesthetics:

'... — the Universe as an argument is necessarily a great work of art, a great poem, — for every fine argument is a poem and a symphony, — just as every true poem is a sound argument. But let us compare it [the Universe] rather with a painting, — with an impressionist seashore piece, — then every Quality in a premiss is one of elementary particles of the painting; they are all meant to go together to make up the intended Quality that belongs to the whole as whole. That total effect is beyond our ken; but we can appreciate in some measure the resultant Quality of parts of the whole, — which Qualities results from the combinations of elementary Qualities that belong to the premisses.' C.S. Peirce<sup>1</sup>

Yes, the work of art has the structure of an argument, a symbol, but the painting is also material — streaks of paint, spots of colour, trails of the brush, that *become* sea: a 'total effect' 'beyond our ken' rather than an aesthetic of 'wholeness' per se. Peirce offers us an aesthetics based on feeling, including qualities precluded by 'good taste':

'If that quality be such to nauseate us, to scare us, or otherwise to disturb us to the point of throwing us out of the mood of esthetic enjoyment, out of the mood of simply contemplating the embodiment of the quality, ... then the object remains nonetheless esthetically good...' C.S. Peirce<sup>2</sup>

It is an account that fits well with the contemporary distaste for the pretty as the petty, an aesthetic that can embrace the sublime, horror and the dissembled Self of psychoanalysis. This aspect of Peirce's aesthetics also concurs with George Steiner's attempt to account for 'a great work of art':



‘... in ways most difficult to articulate, major art and literature, music most readily, convey to us vestiges of the unformed, of the innocence of their source and material..... ‘A carving is the death of stone. More complexly: form has left a “rent” in the potential of non-being, it has diminished the reservoir of what might have been (truer, more exhaustive of its means).’ G. Steiner<sup>3</sup>

This is a vision of the genesis of a work of art distinct from linguistic theories of the sign that characterise signification as substitution for things in the world that entail loss and thus institute an endless insatiable desire. For Steiner the creation of a work of art entails loss of *potential*.

In Peirce’s metaphysics the category of potential is Firstness, the source of all spontaneity, freshness and freedom; that which is *present* to the artist’s eye:

‘Go out under the blue dome of heaven and look at what is present as it appears to the artist’s eye. The poetic mood approaches the state in which the present appears as it is present. Is poetry so abstract and colorless?’<sup>4</sup>

There are versions of contemporary aesthetics that demand the work of art sutures the ‘gap’ between sign and object, when signification is conceived as loss of the Thing.<sup>5</sup> Peirce’s general theory of signs includes the materiality of the work of art in continuum with its symbolic and narrative meanings. The work of the artist, then, is the play of material that comes into signification as a work of art. By looking at the panoply of signs in contemporary works of art my aim is to review aesthetic experience as the interplay of Peirce’s metaphysical categories: the work of art as a re-working of the ‘birth of the sign’.

## **1 The thing itself, modes of the index**

In 1913 Duchamp mounted a bicycle wheel on a wooden stool, inscribed his name, and brought it into the gallery. Presenting the thing itself as the work of art Duchamp’s radical aesthetic prefigures the dislocation of war-torn Europe, a break in the symbolic order, the persistence of things, Thirdness A transgression experienced as a *shock*, a break in the continuum, Secondness an apprehension of that which is ‘beyond our ken’, a radical Other, Firstness.<sup>6</sup>

UK artist Cornelia Parker’s installation at the Serpentine Gallery, ‘The Maybe’, 1995, (fig.1) featured the film actress Tilda Swinton, asleep. For seven consecutive days, eight hours a day, she lay motionless, eyes closed, in a raised, glass casket surrounded by thirty-five other cases containing objects of significance: the rosary

used by Napoleon, rug and cushion from Freud's couch, a half-smoked cigar dropped by Winston Churchill, Turner's travelling watercolour kit, Charles Dickens's quill and Charles Babbage's brain preserved in formaldehyde. This is typical of Parker's methodology: objects signify attachment through a chain of contiguity: like an apostolic succession, we are brought in touch with history.

Another installation 'Colder Darker Matter', 1997 is similarly constructed from the charred remains of a wooden church in San Antonio, Texas, that was struck by lightning. Parker then used these charred remains to make drawings, indexes of the event.

Giving primacy to the indexical status of the work of art as opposed to its capacity to represent through likeness, iconicity, Rosalind Krauss introduced Peirce's concept of the sign-object relation into art historical discourse. Her discussion of Duchamp's canvas *Tu M'*, 1918, points to his awareness of modes of indexical signification: not only *genuine* indexes — the *trace* of the author's hand, his signature and the photograph, but also the *degenerate* indexes — the painted shadow and index finger, which operates as a linguistic shifter involved in the fantasy of self-presence.<sup>7</sup> The photograph as the *trace* of light, a genuine index based on the causal relation between light and silver halides has formed the basis of visual theory from Bazin onwards. In *Camera Lucida* Roland Barthes gives a moving account of the photograph of his deceased mother as a *temporal hallucination*, crossing the ravine of time. The photograph acts as a genuine index that guarantees existence, evoking melancholia for a lost past.

Digital imaging appears to have destabilised the indexical signification of the photograph: the response to light is no longer molecular but quantified digitally and subjected to mathematical compression, that which Lev Manovich terms an augmented indexical connection. As Barthes writes, however, there is a curious literalism about the photograph:

"Look, this is my brother; this is me as a child," etc.; the Photograph is never anything but an antiphon of "Look," "See," "Here it is"; it points a finger at certain vis-à-vis, and cannot escape this pure deictic language.'<sup>8</sup>

In Peirce's semiotics this is the function of the *degenerate index* focusing our attention on *this* as opposed to *that*. The degenerate index points to things, singles out the haecceity of things, through secondness — a pointing finger, the letters of a geometrical figure that operate to refer to the world as if they were proper pronouns. The index, genuine or degenerate, seizes our attention and forces us, with the robustness of Secondness, to pay attention to something. C.S. Peirce<sup>9</sup>

Contemporary digital media art and internet art maintains the play between degenerate and genuine indexes, as if the desire for *presence* and signs of existence remains an aim for these 'virtual' works of art. Susan Collins' webcast picture *Fenlandia* 2004 (fig.2) shows a complex digital-image in the flat landscape of the Fens, south-east England. The webcam sends one pixel per second over a twenty-four hour cycle.<sup>10</sup> Occasionally Collins has unintentionally caught herself in the transmission as a small cluster of pixels, or an individual pixel of a different colour — a self-portrait far removed from mimetic resemblance and yet carrying existential significance.

Thomson and Craighead's *Short Films About Flying*, 2001 (fig.3) combines live feed of planes landing at Logan Airport Boston with randomly loaded net radio. Text is grabbed from a variety of on-line message boards and inserted like cinematic inter-titles to create an overall fictional narrative. At the heart of this filmic parody is the genuine index of the event, the here-and-now, that evokes a particular form of existential anxiety as the work was coincidentally made close to 9.11.'01.<sup>11</sup>

Employing a different strategy, Fanny Aboulker has set herself the task of writing by hand the numbers one to six million, as a memorial to those who died in the Shoah. Aboulker writes for two to three hours every day. The original sheets are exhibited and reproduced on-line. The degenerate index, the number that points to the death of a particular individual, is reinforced in its existential significance by the genuine index, Aboulker's *trace* of hand.<sup>12</sup>

These on-line works belie the disappearance of the genuine index as the sign of existence by crossing over from the evanescent world of the virtual to the world of tangible and palpable experience.

## 2 Interpretants

'...I venture to think that the esthetic state of mind is purest when perfectly naïve without any critical pronouncement...'

'It is not to be supposed that upon every presentation of a sign capable of producing a logical interpretant, such interpretant is actually produced. ... If it is too early, the semiosis will not be carried so far, the other interpretants sufficing for the rude functions for which the sign is used.' C.S. Peirce<sup>13</sup>

Peirce's triadic concept of the sign is triadic — sign-object-interpretant. The interpretant is that determined in the interpreter and therefore classified according to the categories. For example the first effect of listening to music is the *emotional*

interpretant; *energetic* interpretants include not only physiological responses, the unconscious tapping of our feet, but the movement of thought; the *logical* interpretant our recognition of the genre of music.

In the above quotations it is as if Peirce is arguing for the suspension of the logical interpretant in favour of paying attention to our embodied emotional and energetic interpretants. Aesthetic response, then, is an integration of these interpretants, feeling and affect, by an embodied viewer, that is a semiotic Self.<sup>14</sup>

André De Tienne in his paper 'The Sign in Person' points out: 'Peirce gives us many reasons to think that the notion of person is primarily and intrinsically semiotic, a composition made of and kneaded by signs.' A. De Tienne<sup>15</sup>

Freud's early writings on aphasia, 1891, and his correspondence with Fließ, 1895-1896, propose a *semiotics of the psyche* using graphic representations of systems of signs that refer both to mental and physical neuronal processes. Perceptions are 'written down' as types of signs, *pictures* and *traces*, which form the memory systems. These signs are then re-written and reordered, *translated*, into the logic of speech and consciousness. A 'failure of translation' is Freud's first definition of repression, the form of negation that characterises the complex system of knowing and *not*-knowing, the *un*-conscious. Re-reading Freud through Peirce, this movement from pictures and traces towards speech finds its semiotics in Peirce's account of symbol formation as a development from icons or mixed signs.

Freud's 1895 theory of perceptual judgement involves successive acts of comparison between the signs of perception and the signs of memory to identify a *constant* and differentiate the *variable*, which amounts to a subject-predicate organisation of perception.<sup>16</sup> This finds its parallel in Peirce's early Kantian organisation of experience. As De Tienne points out, the principle agent of unification of representations shifts from an act of *judgement* in 1865 to the function of the *interpretant*, 'On a New List of Categories' 1867.<sup>17</sup> The sense of unity of the self as 'a person' emerges through the interpretants — feelings, emotions and thoughts. Freud's early description of the ego as it develops in relation to an 'other', a Neighbour, through acts of comparison between perceptions of the other and memories of quite similar visual impressions of his own body underpins Jacques Lacan's 1936 concept of the 'mirror phase'.<sup>18</sup> This is the phase when the infant forms specular identifications with the Gestalt in the mirror, underpinning primary narcissism and the ideal ego. It is also marked by our positioning as subjects in the familial and gendered social order, the imposition of group ego ideals and symbolic identifications. Lacan is clear that the mirror phase is not only developmental but also logical: it underpins the semiotic account of the self.

The mirror phase as the relation and antagonism between these two structures of identification has been useful to a succession of visual and film theorists in explicating the viewer's identification with the screen — Theresa De Lauretis, Kaja Silverman, Jacqueline Rose, Parveen Adams.

The term 'mirror-neurones' was introduced by Giacomo Rizzolatti who discovered that when a monkey sees another monkey reaching for a food reward the watching monkey exhibits the *same* neuronal response as if it was also in reality reaching for the banana: an iconic sign that results in indexical effect. As Vilnyar Ramachandran writes, these mirror-neurones underpin the liminality of that porous boundary between self and other: 'Stick your tongue out next time you see a new-born-baby and the baby will stick its tongue out, mimicking your behaviour, instantly dissolving the boundary, the arbitrary barrier between self and other.'<sup>19</sup>

In the 1930's the psychoanalyst Paul Schilder working on the phenomenon of the phantom limb drew a distinction between the body-image and our internal postural model of the body. Whereas our body-image develops via the *image* of the other, the postural model is an internal mapping of our body based on *resistance* to other and the physical reality of our world. As John Muller, points out in *Beyond the Psychoanalytic Dyad*, 1996, the symbiotic affirmation between mother and infant formed through *iconic reflection* has to be broken by recognition of *indexical otherness*. Weaning, the action of turning away are *indexes of negation*, whereas saying "no" is an instantiation of the *symbol of negation*.

There are works of art, which draw the viewer into the transitive I-you relation by bringing into play our iconic mimesis through the body-image and the indexical resistance that founds the postural model.

For example the portraits of Cindy Sherman as she seeks to find a photograph of herself that she cannot recognise; Orlan's self-hybridisation through many operations on her face to emulate the ideals of beauty; Louise Bourgeois' rubber sculptures of parts of the body that I, the viewer, feel as resonances within my own body-image. The self-portrait by the surrealist artist and writer Claude Cahun, 1929, (fig.4) draws the viewer into the narcissistic play between self and reflection in the mirror but also introduces the 'other' via a gaze that can only be met outside the frame. When I look at another self-portrait of 1928 I cannot help but echo in my own body the twist in her spine. The Cahun self-portrait, 1929, (fig.5) reproduced in *Bifur*, no.5, 1930, with the title 'Frontière Humaine' raises the question of the boundary between the human and 'other' — shaven-head, the body disappears into blackness, an unknown 'otherness'. My emotional interpretants find expression as, horror and

discomfort; the energetic interpretants manifest as a shiver or an involuntary turning away: a mimetic iconic resonance that instigates real physiological effects.

### 3 Metaphor

Peirce's categorical classification of the work of art embeds iconicity within a complex signifying process, the *hypoicon*. As Peirce writes in the *Syllabus*, 1903, a pure icon has no existence. Hypoicons are divided according to their mode of Firstness: First Firstnesses, *images*; Second Firstnesses, *diagrams*; Third Firstnesses, *metaphors*.<sup>20</sup> Peirce provides us with a way of thinking about *Image* distinct from the material work of art.

Peirce's concept of metaphor as Third Firstness is extremely useful as a semiotic account of the work of art — inherently unruly and actively disruptive, unique in its haecceity it is therefore incompatible with the law-like function of the symbol. Whereas 'parallelism' may hinge on likeness, as in Aristotle's definition of metaphor in his *Poetics*, it can also account for the yoking together of distinct heterodox terms as in Aristotle's *The Art of Rhetoric* creating a parallelism between *this* and *that*.<sup>21</sup> The radical force of metaphor derives from the transgression of categories. It delivers the *shock* of Secondness, the shock of lightening by which the surrealist André Breton defined a good metaphor.

The metaphors produced by the surrealists, Breton, Oppenheim, Buñuel, and the DADA artists, Höch, Heartfield, Schwitters, create a *strangeness* because the viewer is left to create the Thirdness that reconciles separate indexical terms. As Peirce says, it is the sense of totality of the work of art that extends 'beyond our ken' pointing to the unknown first of firstness, *Image*, with possibly disturbing consequences.

In creating her photographic portraits, contemporary artist Helen Sear '2XDH', 2001, (fig.6) literally sandwiches together two separate negative portraits of the same person to make her prints: two indices collided into a hypoicon. The power of the photograph lies in its indeterminacy, where is the individual? The face is poised on the verge of disappearance: into the materiality of the photograph? Nothingness? Firstness?

This photographic process is exactly how Freud introduces the concept of condensation, one of the rhetorical processes constructing the rebus of dreams in 'The Interpretation of Dreams' Condensation is compared to the superimposition of two photographic plates. This is the same semiotic structure as identification as a

parallelism created between two people and identification as earlier defined in the I-you relation, which characterises the formation of the ego.<sup>22</sup> Our fictive ego could therefore be described as a hypoicon of terms, an assemblage of residual identifications.

Works of art, such as those by Cahun, the surrealists and Sear, point to the fragility of our sense of self, unique only in relation to our neighbouring other and the Other of total alterity: the index of existence, as the index of negation, is always at stake:

‘The individual man, since his separate existence is manifested only by ignorance and error, so far as he is anything apart from his fellows, and from what he and they are to be, is only a negation. This is man,

“...proud man,

Most ignorant of what he’s most assured,

His glassy essence.” C.S. Peirce<sup>23</sup>

#### 4 Diagram

‘A diagram, indeed, so far as it has a general signification, is not a pure icon; but in the middle of our reasonings we forget that abstractness in great measure, and the diagram is for us the very thing. So in contemplating a painting, there is a moment when we lose the consciousness that it is not the thing, the distinction of the real and the copy disappears, and it is for the moment a pure dream, — not any particular existence, and yet not general. At that moment we are contemplating an *icon*.’ C.S. Peirce<sup>24</sup>

Compare this with Gilles Deleuze’s account of the work of art as an encounter: ‘As a spectator I experience the sensation *only by entering the painting*, by reaching the *unity of sensing and the sensed*’. Deleuze (2003) gives an exposition of Bacon’s paintings using concepts drawn from Peirce’s semiotics and Henri Bergson’s metaphysics of the image.<sup>25</sup> Deleuze opposes the iconic Figure to the diagram, here defined as the support for asignifying traits — traces of gesture, paint — indexes of haptic experience. Bacon, Deleuze writes, pursues a strange project as a portrait painter, to dismantle the face and re-discover the head. The *essence* of the painting, however, is the dynamic tension between the Figure and the diagram: *rhythm*. Rhythm, according to Deleuze, refers not only to the formal properties of the painting but is the ‘logic of sensation’, which unifies sensory states, the visual, aural and haptic.

According to Deleuze sensations, percepts and affects are beings that could be said to exist in the absence of man. Peirce writes that the qualities of feeling as Firsts, the primary definition of aesthetic experience as feeling, are independent of mind and change. And in Freud we find an impersonal definition of rhythm as that which

governs the processes of mind-body.

Freud writes about the drive of translation, from perception towards consciousness, as not continuous but rather acting in pulses. Central to Freud's concept of pulse, rhythm, periodicity and vacillation, is the play of variation and invariance. It is not a metrical *symbol* but the interplay of iconic repetition interrupted by the index. Freud's use of the word 'Takt' in interpretation refers not to being tactful but to a musical term; the concept of 'working through' *Durcharbeitung* compares to the *Durchführung* 'between the introduction and conclusion of a sonata; Freud refers to the 'tempo' of the psychoanalytic process as opposed to time and dualistic vacillating rhythm of the drives, Eros and Thanatos.<sup>26</sup>

Peirce quotes Josiah Royce on the continuum of consciousness:

...“while the successive presentations of the rhythm form a sort of stream of events, each one of which gradually dies out of mind as the new event occurs. In consciousness there is no such thing as an indivisible present moment.” C.S. Peirce<sup>27</sup>

DADA filmmakers Viking Eggeling and Hans Richter made abstract scroll paintings and silent films that aspired to the condition of music, taking their reference to rhythm from Bergson: 'What is real is the continual *change of form: form is only a snapshot view of a transition.*' H. Bergson<sup>28</sup>

Hans Richter's *Rhythmus*, 1921, is a purely abstract film in which squares of black and white appear to open and close and move in relation to one another, playing with ambiguities of space, shifting one behind the other, reversing relations of figure and ground and giving rise to an experience of depth. The dynamism of the process draws the viewer into a rhythmical notation of breath and pulse, light and dark. The film is not an iconic representation of an object but a haptic experience of Rhythm that intimates a moving *Image*. It presents a manifestation of the conundrum of the interaction of the categories in the act of perception: the thirdness of continuity that is marked by the secondness of difference between qualities, and the continuum that is firstness.

The contemporary UK artist Louisa Fairclough makes digital video works that play with the relation between the figurative and abstraction. 'Steppe' 1999 documents Fairclough's transcontinental journey by bicycle to the Aral Sea. Stretching a one-second pan to a thirteen-minute shimmering horizon, it oscillates forwards then back through twenty-five frames. Occasionally the trace of a human figure appears caught in the layers of editing.<sup>29</sup> As in Richter's rhythms of black and white there is a sense of imminent disappearance. To quote again from Deleuze:



We can seek the unity of rhythm only at the point where rhythm itself plunges into chaos, into the night, at the point where differences of level are perpetually and violently mixed.' G. Deleuze<sup>30</sup>

This plunge into 'the chaos of night' returns us to the question of origin, where the sign has to differentiate from the 'nothingness' that is 'everything'. As opposed to an account of the 'person' identified through argument, thought, or the logical interpretant, Peirce also offers us another, more tenuous, analogue for the separateness of personhood:

'A person is, in truth, like a cluster of stars, which appears to be one star when viewed with the naked eye, but which scanned with the telescope of scientific psychology is found on the one hand, to be multiple within itself, and on the other hand to have no absolute demarcation from a neighbouring condensation.' C.S. Peirce<sup>31</sup>

## 5 Image

As opposed to an account of the work of art as a representation of an *object* Peirce's account of the work of art as a hypoicon offers us a shift in focus to the haptic force of metaphor, which, through the shock of secondness (the transgression of habits of meaning) opens up an awareness of *Image*. It is a radicalisation of the function of the work of art precisely because it disbands the 'object' in favour of the emergence of the sign. This view of the work of art as a 're-staging' of the sign can be further articulated through Peirce's version of phenomenology, phaneroscopy:

'Phaneroscopy is the description of the phaneron; and by the phaneron I mean the collective total of all that is in any way or in any sense present to the mind, quite regardless of whether it corresponds to any real thing or not.'<sup>32</sup>

The word phaneron is derived from the Greek for all that is manifest in its entirety, as opposed to all that which can be observed in the external world: semblance and seemingness as opposed to representation. Its relations are best notated through the existential graphs, but the best student of the phaneron is the artist who sees what is present just as it presents itself. The work of the artist is therefore also to graph that 'face-to-face' state of awareness before what Peirce calls the Prebit, the direct object of consciousness:

'... once I do become aware of the Prebit I am aware not aware not merely of a before a Sign of it, or Substitute for it, or any sort of proxy, vicar, attorney, succedaneum, dummy, or representative of it but to be put *facie ad faciem* before the Phaneron, the very Prebit itself.' C.S. Peirce<sup>33</sup>

This confrontation '*facie ad faciem*' before the phaneron therefore constitutes the secondness of experience, the appearance of a *dyadic* relation, ego and non-ego,

'self and other' that reflects Peirce's early his early interest in Coleridge's *tuism* and his first formulation of the sign through the appearance of the relation *I/you/IT*. It is this initial split of ego and non-ego that becomes the kernel of the triadic sign, signification and semiosis.<sup>34</sup>

The transition from firstness to secondness, from possibility to existence, only becomes a semiotic sign with the formation of the interpretant, the sign that is distinct from the tertiary elements of the phaneron. There is, however, no easy definition of the sign:

'Its essential characters are no doubt that it should have an object and an interpretant, or interpreting sign, but to convert that statement into a definition is not so easy. There is no doubt in my own mind that all our thinking is dialogic, that is, of the nature of an appeal from the self of the present moment to the self of further consideration, in which the interpretant of the thought is to be looked for.' C.S. Peirce<sup>35</sup>

In addressing this problem of the sign, visual theory has turned to theories of the 'pre-verbal', for example the Julia Kristeva's psychoanalytic theorisation of the pre-logical organisation of speech anchored in the rhythms of the mother's body, the chora, distinguished from verbal language by the thetic break. A point of view opposed by theorists such as the psychologist Colwyn Trevarthen, who uses Peirce's semiotics to stress the continuum between the *to-and-fro* of touch and the gaze between mother and child, and the development of verbal language.<sup>36</sup>

Claude Cahun's *Aveux non avenue* (1930) plate X (fig. 7) presents the viewer with a complex photo-collage recycling Cahun's previous self-portraits, juxtaposing the fragmented body with other visual elements. The text of *Aveux non avenue* is a book-length assemblage of memoir, poems, letters, fiction, dialogue and essays that address the fallacies of narcissism, narcissistic love objects, and the panoply of sexuality. In plate X the dyadic relation of narcissism is interrupted by the oedipal figure: the family, the triadic flag, 'La Sainte Famille', the letter  $\alpha$  that floats in an ambiguous space. A tree bearing strange fruits, an eye, mouth, ear and hand that function as the indexes of communication, grows from the navel of a body.

In 'The Interpretation of Dreams' Freud refers to the navel of the dream as the limit of interpretation, which is also, paradoxically, infinite interpretation. Freud does not comment on his choice of image, but navel signifies birth, suggesting a rupturing parturition of the sign. In the curious topology of the psyche birth and death of the sign are signified by the same 'hole' in signification.

Cahun plays a highly self-conscious game with the emergence of signification, semiosis, and the emergence of the self. Consider the Cahun collage as a presentation of the phaneron; the page, then, takes on the role of graphing the phaneron. As I

enter into the encounter with the work of art I slip through the stages of symbol, metaphor, diagram to *Image*. I am brought face-to-face with the direct object of consciousness that seeks a new interpretant.

Peirce offers a way of viewing the work of art as a re-staging of the sign from nothingness, which as Peirce writes in 1898 is not 'the nothing of negation' but 'the nothing of not having been born':

'It is the germinal nothing, in which the whole universe is involved or foreshadowed. As such, it is absolutely undefined and unlimited possibility — boundless possibility. There is no compulsion and no law. It is boundless freedom.' C.S. Peirce <sup>37</sup>

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#### Notes

<sup>1</sup> C.S. PEIRCE C.S. PEIRCE, *The Essential Peirce: Selected Philosophical Writings, Vol. II (1893-1913)*. Peirce Edition Project eds, Bloomington and Indianapolis, Indiana University Press, 1998, p.194. Abbr. as *EP2*.

<sup>2</sup> C.S. PEIRCE, *EP2* p.201.

<sup>3</sup> G. STEINER, *Grammars of Creation*, New Haven/London, Yale University Press, 2002, p. 33.

<sup>4</sup> C.S. PEIRCE, *The Collected Papers of Charles S. Peirce*, 8 vols, C. Hartshorne, P. Weiss and A.W. Burks ed, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1931. Abbr as *CP*. *CP* 1.418; *CP* 5.44; and *EP2*, pp.149-'50.

<sup>5</sup> P. FLORENCE and N. FOSTER eds, *Differential Aesthetics: Art practices, philosophy and feminist understandings*, Aldershot/Burlington USA, Ashgate, 2000, gives an interdisciplinary discussion on aesthetic experience and judgement, beauty and feminism. The essay by Barb Bolt, pp.315-332, introduces the work of Peirce precisely replying to the criticism that signification necessarily entails the loss of the thing.

<sup>6</sup> C.S. PEIRCE, *CP* 1.337; 1.357; 1.358.

<sup>7</sup> R. KRAUSS, "Notes on the Index parts I and II", in *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths*, Cambridge, Mass., MIT Press, 1986, pp.196-218.

<sup>8</sup> R. BARTHES, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, R. Howard trans, London, Fontana, 1984, p.115.

<sup>9</sup> C.S. PEIRCE, *EP2* pp.163-'4; 171-'2; 380.

<sup>10</sup> Documentation of *Fenlandia* is to be found on Susan Collins' website <<http://www.susan->

[collins.net/fenlandia](http://collins.net/fenlandia)>. Collins' current live relay from Silicon Glen on the banks of Loch Faskally, Pitlochry, Perthshire, *Glenlandia* will continue until 2007.

<sup>11</sup> For THOMSON and CRAIGHEAD's archive and current projects please see <http://www.thomson-craighead.net/docs/sfdoc.html>

<sup>12</sup> F.ABOULKER: 'When finished, this piece will be the numbers from zero to six million written on sheets of paper. Six million is the number of Jews killed during the Second World War or, anyway, the number everybody remembers. It will be finished on 7th February 2010 if I write 1500 numbers a day.' <<http://www.sixmillion.org/>>

<sup>13</sup> C.S. PEIRCE, *EP2* pp.189; 414. For the classification of the interpretants please see *CP2.228*; 5.475; 5.482.

<sup>14</sup> This is not to argue against 'reasonable feeling' and the flow of semiosis towards what Peirce calls the final interpretant, *CP* 5.491, the *summum bonum*, but to pay full attention to the flow of sign-interpretants as the *meaning* of the work of art.

<sup>15</sup> A.DE TIENNE, "The Sign in Person", in *Caderno da 5a Jornada do Centro de Estudos Peirceanos*, CEPE, Program of Post-Graduate Studies in Communication and Semiotics, Pontificia Universidade Católica de São Paulo, 2002, pp.28-38, p30.

<sup>16</sup> S.FREUD, "Project for a Scientific Psychology", in *The Origins of Psycho-Analysis, Letters to Wilhelm Fliess, Drafts and Notes: 1887-1902*, E. Mosbacher and J. Strachey, trans, M. Bonaparte, A. Freud, and E. Kris eds, London, Imago, 1954, pp.347-446.

<sup>17</sup> A. DE TIENNE De Tienne, "The Sign in Person", op.cit. points out, the principle agent of unification of representations according to Peirce shifts from an act of *judgement* in 1865, *W1* p.167, to the function of the *interpretant*, in 1867, "On a New List of Categories" in *The Essential Peirce: Selected Philosophical Writings, Vol.1 (1867-1893)*. N. Hauser and C. Kloesel eds, Bloomington and Indianapolis, Indiana University Press, 1992. Abbr. as *EP1*. *EP1* p.6.

<sup>18</sup> J.LACAN, "The mirror stage as formative of the function of the I", in *Écrits, A Selection*, A.Sheridan trans, London, Routledge, 1977, pp.1-8.

<sup>19</sup> S.ROSE, *The 21st Century Brain: Explaining, Mending and Manipulating the Mind*, London, Vintage Books, 2006, pp.166, 219; V.RAMACHANDRAN, BBC Reith lectures of 2003 <<http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio4/reith>> focuses on *mimicry* and the ability to mime complex actions as central to theories of communication and autism. Please also see V.RAMACHANDRAN and S.BLAKELEE, *Phantoms in the Brain: Human Nature and the Architecture of the Mind*, London/NY, Harper Perennial, 2005, pp.25-'7.

<sup>20</sup> C.S. PEIRCE, *EP2* pp.273-274.

<sup>21</sup> For essays, which address the iconicity and the heterodox of the metaphor, respectively please see S. PETRELLI "Meaning, metaphor, and Interpretation: Modelling new worlds", and C. HAUSMAN "A review of prominent theories of metaphor and metaphorical reference revisited," in *Semiotica* 161 (1), 2006, pp.75-118 and 213-230.

<sup>22</sup> S.FREUD, *Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, J. Strachey trans and ed, London, Hogarth Press, 1955. Abbr. as *S.E. SE IV* pp.282-'4; 319-'20.

<sup>23</sup> C.S. PEIRCE, *CP5.317*.

<sup>24</sup> C.S. PEIRCE, *EP1* p.226.

<sup>25</sup> G.DELEUZE and F.GUATTARI, *What is Philosophy?* G. Burchill and H. Tomlinson trans, London, Verso, 1994, p.35. G.DELEUZE, *Francis Bacon: the logic of sensation*, D. Smith trans, London/NY, Continuum Books, 2003.

<sup>26</sup> For an exposition of Freud's use of musical terms throughout his writings please see Darian Leader's "Freud, Music and Working Through" in D. LEADER, *Freud's Footnotes*, London, Faber, 2000, pp. 88-119.

<sup>27</sup> C.S. PEIRCE *CP* 8.291.

<sup>28</sup> H. BERGSON, *Creative Evolution*, A. Mitchell trans, Mineola/NY, Dover Publications, Inc., 1998, pp.318-'9.

<sup>29</sup> Please see archive stills from Fairclough's *Steppe* and her current work on <<http://www.louisafairclough.com/gallery3.htm>>.

<sup>30</sup> G. DELEUZE, op. cit. p.44.

<sup>31</sup> C.S. PEIRCE, Manuscripts collated and numbered in R. Richard, *Annotated Catalogue of the Papers of Charles S. Peirce*, Cambridge, MA, University of Massachusetts Press, 1967. Abbr. as *R. R* 403. A. DE TIENNE, "The Sign in Person", op.cit. p. 34.

<sup>32</sup> C.S. PEIRCE, *CP* 1.284. I am indebted to André De Tienne for his discussion of the phaneron that took place at the PEP, 2003 and for De Tienne's papers: A. DE TIENNE, "Quand l'apparence (se) fait signe: la genèse de la représentation chez Peirce", in *Recherches Sémiotiques/Semiotic Inquiry*, 20 no. 1-2-3, © Association canadienne de sémiotique/ Canadian semiotic Association, 2000, pp.95-144, and 'Is Phaneroscopy as a Pre-Semiotic Science Possible?' given in Turin, May 30<sup>th</sup>, 2003.

<sup>33</sup> C.S. PEIRCE, Manuscripts collated and numbered by the Peirce Edition Project are here abbreviated as MS. MS 645: 5.

<sup>34</sup> C.S. PEIRCE Century Dictionary entry for *tuism*, in *Writings of Charles S. Peirce: A Chronological Edition*, Vol. 1. M. Fisch ed, Bloomington, IN, Indiana University Press, 1982. Abbr. as *W1*, *W1* p.xxix. "I, IT, and THOU A Book giving Instruction in some of the Elements of Thought", *W1* pp.45-46; "Modus of the IT", *W1* pp.47-49; "The Natural History of Words", Jan. 1869, *MS* 40. I/THOU/IT continues to underpin the introduction of the 'New List', 1867, *EP1* p.6.

<sup>35</sup> C.S. PEIRCE, *MS* 284 p.58.

<sup>36</sup> C. TREVARTHEN, "Infant Semiosis", in *Origins of Semiosis: Sign Evolution in Nature and Culture*, W. Nöthe ed, Berlin/New York, Mouton de Gruyter, 1994, pp.219-252.

<sup>37</sup> C.S. PEIRCE, *CP* 6.217.

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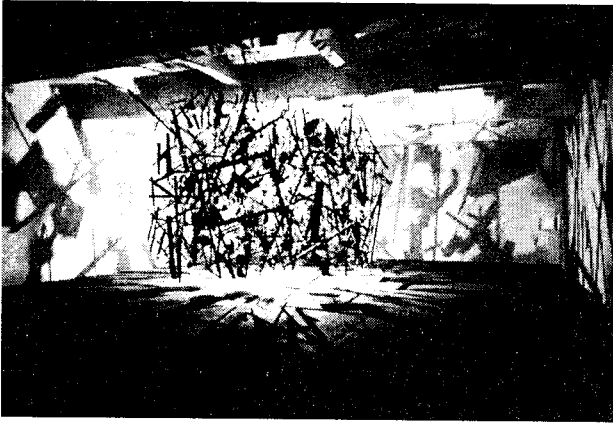
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1. Cornelia Parker: 'Cold Dark Matter: An Exploded View', 1991. © Cornelia Parker, permission given by artist through Frith St. Gallery, London.



2. Susan Collins: *Fenlandia* 2004. © Susan Collins, permission given by artist.



3. Thomson and Craighead 'Short Films About Flying', 2001 © Thomson and Craighead, permission given by artists.



4. Claude Cahun, Self-portrait in mirror, 1929 © Jersey Museums Service.



5. Claude Cahun, 'Frontière Humaine', 1929, repr. in *Bifur*, nr.5, 1930 © Jersey Museums Service.





6. Helen Sear, '2XDH', 2001. © Helen Sear, permission given by the artist.



7. Claude Cahun, *Aveux non Avenus*, 1930, Pl. X. Copyright non-traceable

## L'image et l'image peinte : Panofsky d'après Peirce

### I

#### *Quelques remarques sur la structure du signe, avec un entretien préliminaire*

### 1

Je vous propose d'abord quelques observations qui auraient pour but de nous faire réfléchir à propos de ce qu'est la place quelque peu changeante à mon avis de l'image — ainsi que de la conscience que nous en avons — dans le triadisme peircien du signe. Et, dans ce dessein, je prends quelque chose que nous apprend l'éthologie animale. Il paraît que le *singe* ne reconnaît pas son image dans le miroir : il y voit un autre singe, c'est tout. Les choses changent si nous passons au *chimpanzé*, qui reconnaît son image, il « se voit ». Un peu plus en avant et nous trouvons l'humain. Face à son image l'homme s'atteste comme un « moi », le sien, dont il obtiendra désormais la confirmation. — La littérature de fiction nous dit à quel point c'est malheureux de ne pas se reconnaître dans son image : cela est un signe de non-identité, un manque d'âme, la mort.

### 2

Cela dit, nous savons que parallèlement aux catégories phanérosopiques — *Firstness*, *Secondness*, *Thirdness*, ou Priméité, Secondité et Tiercéité — le modèle du Signe dans la pensée peircienne peut aussi être rendu par une structure triadique, avec le *Representamen* au niveau de la priméité, l'*Objet* au niveau de la secondité, et un *Interprétant*, qui n'est pas l'interprète, dans la tiercéité — trois faces du Signe qui sont à leur tour des signes. Or, qu'est-ce, tout d'abord, le representamen, la priméité du signe ? Non pas le réel, mais d'une certaine manière son préalable : le *possible*. Alors, du sentiment — qui se trouve dans cette première catégorie — Peirce nous apprend que « *the feeling is nothing but a quality, and a quality is not conscious : it is a mere possibility* » (I. 310). Donc le representamen serait un *possible qualitatif*, ou bien, comme Peirce écrit souvent, un « *maybe* », ou un « *may-being* ». Or ce *possible*, se trouverait-il à un autre niveau qu'à celui du representamen ? Serait-il un interprétant ? Dans la mesure que « *a Sign is a Representamen with a mental Interpretant* » (II. 274)<sup>1</sup>, on pourrait penser que c'est surtout à ce dernier niveau que Peirce en parle comme d'une *quale-consciousness*. Il s'agirait donc d'un brin de qualité ou d'une conscience qualitative qui n'ayant à se confronter à quelque chose n'est pas, par conséquent, consciente... Et qu'est-ce que cette conscience ? Dans *Scientific metaphysics* nous lisons d'abord :

Now a *quality* is a consciousness. I do not say a *waking* consciousness — but still, something of the nature of de consciousness. A *sleeping* consciousness, perhaps. // A possibility, then, or potentiality, is a particular *tinge* of consciousness.<sup>2</sup>

Et un peu plus loin :

Quality or *quale*-consciousness is all that *it is in and for itself* [je souligne]... essentially solitary and celibate, a dweller in the desert. (VI. 234).

Cette conscience d'abord dormante, puis célibataire comme un habitant du désert, n'est peut-être, pour l'instant, que celle du singe vis-à-vis de son image dans le miroir : une conscience inconsciente, car elle se méconnaît, elle s'ignore. Son image réfléchie serait pour lui, interprète, un representamen premier (*a first firstness*).

Quant à la secondéité de l'*Objet* — la fermeté ou la résistance —, il s'agit de l'effectivité du réel. Ici le possible prend corps, mais pour que ce corps soit pour ainsi dire un réel en effet il lui faut un *Interprétant*, cette tiercéité médiatrice qui met les deux autres dans un rapport effectif.

Alors l'*Interprétant* est un contenu psychique, ou un signe mental, qui sert de médiateur entre le Representamen et son Objet en régularisant leur relation dans un temps présent et comme prévision de futur.

### 3

Or c'est au niveau de l'*Objet* — tout autant peut-être qu'à celui de l'*Interprétant* — que nous trouvons chez Peirce ce qui a rapport à l'*image*. « The most fundamental [ division of signs ] is into *Icons*, *Indices* and *Symbols* » (II. 275), nous avertit-il. Donc de l'*Objet*, secondéité du Signe, découle l'*Ikône*, l'*Indice*, le *Symbole*, cette structure dont Peirce se sert plus fréquemment (VIII. 368; Lady Welby).

Voyons cela en raccourci en y ajoutant la triade du temps:

a ) L'*ikône*, au premier niveau de la secondéité, est le *possible qualitatif*. En étant ce qu'il y a *encore* du possible dans l'effectivité réelle, l'*ikône* incarne selon Peirce un temps *passé*.

b ) L'*indice* (ou signe indiciaire) est la réalité effective comme résistance, on dirait même la *force brute*. Il est le second de la secondéité du Signe. Par conséquent, il est aussi le réel de la réalité dans un temps *présent*.

c) Finalement, le symbole est le dispositif où s'annonce ou bien s'accomplit le sens — ce que Lacan appelait, en se référant à l'Interprétant en sa totalité comme un raisonnement, le *colophon* : sa fin comme clôture. Mais, puisque le symbole est le troisième de la tiercéité du Signe, il se place en quelque sorte dans un temps à venir, un temps *futur*.

#### 4

Donc si nous accordons une conscience au singe, celle-ci sera plutôt de la nature de la « *quale-consciousness* » qui nous mène à penser à une absence d'autoconscience, et de ce fait même d'un « moi ». Prenons alors la structure du signe : Representamen, Objet, interprétant. On vient de voir que l'image du singe se trouverait au niveau de la priméité, elle est un *possible*, ce que Peirce appelle un « maybe », un peut-être. Bref, un Representamen. Toutefois, si nous considérons qu'elle est un reflet — disons que l'image comme telle est une « chose »<sup>3</sup> —, alors, faudrait-il la placer aussi au niveau de la secondéité. Voilà une effectivité réelle, un Objet. L'embarras commencerait dès qu'on en vient au singe comme interprète et que l'on s'interroge à propos de l'Interprétant — le contenu psychique de l'animal — en voyant son image. Le problème, d'abord, n'a pas l'air très grave. Il y a sans doute un Interprétant premier, ou immédiat, qui ne dépasse pas l'ordre de la sensation (*feeling*) jointe qu'elle est, celle-ci, à ce qui se trouve présent là comme signe : l'Interprétant affectif ou émotionnel (*emotional*). Mais ce n'est pas tout. Il y a aussi sans doute un Interprétant second ou dynamique avec l'effet énergétique produit par le signe sur l'animal (*energetic*). Que le singe ne reconnaisse pas l'image comme sienne, nous indique que chez lui l'interprétant final ou logique (*logical*) est absent.

Les choses ne vont pas dans ce sens avec le chimpanzé, qui doit avoir, lui, une conscience de soi. Ici, une notion du « moi » passerait éventuellement par l'image qui le représente. Le chimpanzé aurait-t-il une conscience identitaire ? Autrement dit, serait-il un « moi » durable dans le temps, ou l'image où il se reconnaît « ne fait-elle que passer » ? Et encore : y a-t-il dans l'interprétant du chimpanzé un fil, une continuité de la connaissance, qui permettrait de parler d'un interprétant *prévoyant* comme chez les humains ? Ici, en fait, l'image réfléchie dans le miroir serait, comme avec le singe, une *réalité effective*, une Secondéité (*Objet*) en même temps qu'une *secondéité dans la Tiercéité*, c'est-à-dire un *interprétant dynamique (énergétique)*.

Mais ce n'est pas encore assez. Que le chimpanzé, contrairement au singe, puisse se reconnaître dans l'image, ouvre entre les deux animaux un écart formidable. Le

fait de *se percevoir* place par là même le chimpanzé au seuil même de l'humain — ce dont Lacan en fait la théorie sous le nom du « stade du miroir ». Or il faut bien que nous voyions ici un quelconque Interprétant final, ou logique : effet « *that would be produced on the mind by the Sign after sufficient development of thought* » (VIII. 343). Mais un tel développement de la pensée de quelle nature est-il ? Serait-il un interprétant final sans fil, c'est-à-dire un contenu mental incapable d'enchaîner les moments ou expériences différentes qui ont rapport à la perception de soi dans une image, et donc un interprétant immobilisé dans le temps présent ?

Alors, la preuve ou la « confirmation » de soi (une vraie conscience identitaire) nous signale de même qu'ici, l'image se trouve tout aussi bien — comme chez le chimpanzé — au niveau de la *Tiercéité* peircienne, puisqu'elle est en fait un *interpretant final* (ou *logique*) dans la tiercéité de la Tiercéité.

Impossible d'aller plus loin, sauf, bien sûr, à considérer plusieurs sortes d'interprétants logiques. . . Or cet Interprétant troisième, est-il chez le chimpanzé une *habitude* — au sens peircien d'une *croyance* (II. 435) — tout aussi bien que chez l'homme, ou est-il plutôt une disposition naturelle (*natural disposition*) ?

Et que dirait-on encore de cet événement dans lequel le Narcisse humain se voit, mais néanmoins comme s'il était autre ? Ceci, qui ramènerait au premier d'abord le personnage au stade du singe, serait peut-être ce que Peirce appelle un *habit-change* dans le jugement, c'est-à-dire une singularité (discontinuité) dans le continuum de la pensée. . . (II. 435).

## II

### ***L'«image» d'après Peirce. La peinture figurative***

Il n'est pas aisé de savoir ce que Peirce désigne sous le mot image dans les *Elements of Logic*, notamment si on se met dans le cas de savoir si « image » évoque l'icône, ou bien si l'icône n'est qu'une image. Depuis l'image mentale (l'idée) jusqu'à l'image graphique (schéma, diagramme), d'images il y en a beaucoup, le terme se rencontre en beaucoup d'occurrences. Et dans celle où Peirce avance à ce propos un point de vue, les raisons qu'il donne pour nous faire passer de l'Icône à la priméité, au moyen de la *qualité représentative*, n'est pas, à vrai dire, ce qu'il y a de plus immédiatement compréhensible ou de plus clair — surtout si l'on tient compte du passage qu'il fait par l'Hypoicône. En un premier temps on peut lire :

An Icon is a Representamen whose Representative Quality is a Firstness of it as a First. [ ... ] A Representamen by Firstness alone can only have a similar Object. Thus, a Sign by Contrast denotes its object only by virtue of a contrast, or Secondness, between two qualities.

Et puis on trouve :

A sign by Firstness is an image of its object, and, more strictly speaking, can only be an *idea*. For it must produce an Interpretant idea; and an external object excites an idea by a reaction upon the brain. But, most strictly speaking, even an idea, except in the sense of a possibility, or Firstness, cannot be an icon. A possibility alone is an Icon purely by virtue of its quality; and its object can only be a Firstness. But a sign may be iconic, that is, may represent its object mainly by its similarity, no matter what its mode of being. If a substantive be wanted, an iconic representamen may be termed a *hypoicon*. // Any material image, as a painting, is largely conventional in its mode of representation; but in itself, without legend or label it may be called an *hypoicon*.» (II. 275)<sup>4</sup>.

Ainsi, l'image physique, ou matériellement présente, dont le mode de représenter se fait au moyen d'une technique quelconque, n'est déjà plus — « *without legend or label* » — une icône, mais une hypoicône. Et ce qui est curieux, c'est que nous ne savons pas, sauf à en tirer nous-mêmes quelques conclusions, si l'*hypo* indique ici que l'hypoicône est avant (un peu moins) ou après (davantage) que l'icône tout court. Étant un *hypo*, cela devrait être un peu moins. Mais puisqu'il établit un rapport de l'hypoicône à une peinture, il y aurait peut-être quelque utilité à voir ce que Peirce nous dit ailleurs des signes par ressemblance :

A sign may serve as a sign simply because it happens to resemble its object. This resemblance will, then, constitute its internal meaning. But it can not be said to have any external meaning, since it does not profess to represent anything; for if it did, that would be a manner of signifying its object, non consisting in merely resembling it. (VIII. 119)<sup>5</sup>.

On dirait alors qu'une l'hypoicône — une peinture figurative — est une icône qui tire son sens premier du fait de représenter son objet (une quelconque entité du monde) en ajoutant, à cette fonction représentative, un processus de signification de complexité supérieure.

Peirce nous offre par la suite une tripartition de l'hypoicône en *images*, *diagrammes* et *métaphores* (II. 276). Les hypoicônes qui font partie des simples qualités (*partake*

*of simple qualities*), ou Priméité première (*First Firstness*), sont des images. Donc si les images sont des hypoicônes qui participent des qualités (de l'iconicité), les diagrammes seront des hypoicônes qui participent plutôt du réel (des indices) dans la secondéité. Ainsi, les métaphores seront, dans la tiercéité, des hypoicônes qui adhèrent, en quelque sorte, à une loi (n'y appartenant pas tout à fait), peut-être à une règle ou une convention, une habitude, etc., tout comme le symbole.

Or dans la mesure où le signe iconique représente « effectivement » quelque chose d'autre, il est appelé *hypoicône*. Mais, pour cela, doit-il avoir d'abord une existence d'objet produit par un moyen quelconque (reflet dans le miroir ou peinture, photo ou autre...), et cela, pour devenir ensuite une réponse à un principe quelconque au moyen duquel nous le percevrons comme un dispositif de représentation (l'image du chimpanzé dans le miroir, la peinture d'un paysage, la photo du Roi...).

### **La méthode de Panofsky**

Venons-en donc à *L'œuvre d'art et ses significations* (1969), ce livre où Erwin Panofsky met en avant une méthode d'examen et compréhension de l'œuvre d'art, tout en dévoilant sa complicité intellectuelle avec l'auteur qui nous concerne. Car c'est Peirce, sans doute, qui l'aide à rendre claires quelques-unes de ses idées. Tout d'abord, Panofsky reconnaît que les « intentions » qu'une œuvre recèle de l'artiste qui en est l'auteur ne nous parviennent pas sans altérations, puisqu'on est toujours influencés par trois forces : « nôtre... attitude, laquelle... dépend à la fois de nos expériences personnelles et de notre contexte historique » (1969 : 41).

*Attitude, expérience et contexte.* Avec l'attitude du sujet, il s'agit non pas d'un dessein ou d'une décision quelconque, encore moins d'une action, mais d'une *disposition* — tempérament et caractère avec sa culture et ses préférences (le goût, dirions-nous) — ; bref, ce que Peirce appelle un « possible qualitatif ». Avec les deux autres principes, ceci ébauche une personnalité déterminée par son expérience dans un moment quelconque de l'histoire, et qui va servir de crible pour l'interprétation, pour le jugement.

Comment ne pas voir dans l'attitude personnelle — première des trois principes — une priméité que l'expérience doit rendre effective ? Et cette attitude, qui dépend d'une *disposition*, ou état d'âme, atteint sa dimension réelle au moyen de l'expérience tout aussi réelle (une secondéité), en acquérant en même temps un sens à partir du contexte, donc dans la tiercéité.

C'est de cette structure, disons caractérielle, du sujet que Panofsky tire trois concepts, servant maintenant à « re-crée » l'œuvre d'art. Ces concepts, il les nomme : *idée*, *forme*, *contenu*.

Panofsky écrit : « plus la proportion entre les accents portés sur l' 1/2 idée 1/2 et sur la 1/2 forme 1/2 approche un état d'équilibre, et plus éloquentement l'œuvre révélera son 1/2 contenu 1/2. » Révélation malaisée, du fait même qu'elle dépend de l'équilibre. Et Panofsky de préciser : « ce 1/2 contenu 1/2 (au sens où je l'entends, par opposition au sujet traité) peut être décrit, selon les termes de Peirce, comme 1/2 *that witch a work betrays but does not parade* 1/2 (ce qu'une œuvre laisse voir, sans en faire parade) » ( *Idem* ). Il y a donc un « contenu » qu'on nous montre, *betrays*, mais pas tout à fait, et qui appartient à l'œuvre dans la mesure même où il concerne aussi l'interprète. Tel est ainsi le sens du mot « re-création » dont se sert Panofsky pour parler de l'interprétation.

Somme toute, il y aurait ici une double séquence (les deux colonnes au centre du diagramme) qui, qu'en partant de la catégorisation peircienne, se montrerait assez proche du signe peircien dans sa structure (colonne de droite).

| Catégorisation<br>peircienne                                | Réception.<br>Recréation  | Production | "fundamental<br>division of signs" |
|---|---------------------------|------------|------------------------------------|
| <b>Priméité</b><br><i>possible<br/>qualitatif</i>           | attitude<br>personnelle   | idée       | <b>iconisme</b><br>passé           |
| <b>Sécondéité</b><br><i>réalisation,<br/>effectivité</i>    | expérience<br>personnelle | forme      | <b>indiciaire</b><br>présent       |
| <b>Tiercéité</b><br><b>contenu psychique</b><br>(médiation) | contexte<br>historique    | contenu    | <b>symbolique</b><br>futur         |

Il ne nous reste qu'à reprendre le Signe peircien pour en venir à l'Objet. On le voit dans la colonne à droite du tableau (« fundamental division of signs »). L'image peinte : a) serait iconique dans la mesure où elle *représente* quelque chose d'autre pour quelqu'un (que la représentation ici soit plus ou moins figurative n'a pas trop d'importance) ; b) serait d'une nature indiciaire dans ce qu'elle a de *présentation* (facture ou « corps » physique liée au métier), et, c) aurait sa dimension sémantique comme contenu symbolique, ou, pour mieux dire, dans un sens qui se veut médiateur entre les données précédentes et en même temps qu'il les dépasse.



Or, au niveau de la priméité iconique, l'image peinte se trouverait quelque part entre l'évocation et la *représentation* (figurative) au moyen d'une convention visuelle. Autrement dit, elle évolue de l'icône comme *may-being*, ou possibilité qualitative, à l'hypoicône.

Indiciairement, par contre, elle n'a pas à représenter quoi que ce soit : à la limite elle (se) *présente*. Cela nous conduit à distinguer en elle la Représentation de la Présence, — soit le *tableau* (à cause de l'iconicité) de la *peinture* (sa dimension indiciaire).

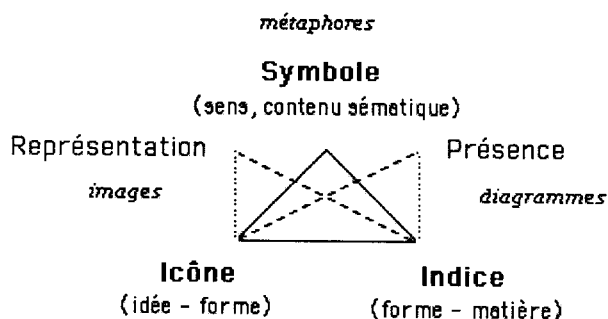
Finalement, quant au symbolique, c'est le « contenu » de Panofsky : un fonds sémantique qui en étant lié au sujet représenté ne coïncide pas avec lui.

### Pour conclure

L'iconisme d'une image a toujours à voir avec une forme dont le représenter peut être très figuratif, cela étant dû à des procédés représentatifs justes, à moins qu'il ne soit plutôt qu'une évocation faible tout à fait subjective. En tant que figurative, une image comme celle de la *Flagellation* d'Urbino, de Piero della Francesca, serait, d'après Peirce, une hypoicône de plein droit. Par contre, un échantillon d'*action painting*, mettons un tableau de Pollock réalisé au moyen du *dripping*, pourrait être appelé « icône » même si nous n'y voyons — ou peut-être même pour cette raison — que des formes peu définies dans l'espace du support : traces, empreintes, éclaboussures. Mais ce n'est pas tout. Car si nous allons en avant dans cette direction, nous remarquons aussitôt que chez Piero, la forte figurativité de l'œuvre rend celle-ci presque indifférente à la secondéité indiciaire (les surfaces soignées, la finition nette, l'image comme « apparition » : tout est fait en vue de la recherche de l'*illusion*). Par contre, la fidélité de son représenter la place bien dans la tiercéité symbolique. Ce qui est tout à fait différent pour l'*action painting* ou la peinture-action. Celle-ci ferait d'une bonne partie d'images de Pollock des modèles achevés d'indicialité ; et, à l'inverse, son symbolisme n'est ou bien inexistant ou un symbolisme « singulier » (*singular symbol*), se prenant soi-même par objet.

Bien entendu, que ce soit Piero della Francesca ou Jackson Pollock, leurs œuvres ont sûrement un sens, une signification : ce serait essayer de « comprendre » l'image dont il s'agit, selon l'endroit où se range le mieux, dans la priméité iconique (évocation, figurativité), la secondéité indiciaire (réalisation matérielle : épaisseur des pâtes, *action painting* ou peinture à jet) ou la tiercéité symbolique (à la limite, l'art appelé conceptuel, certaines actions considérés artistiques).

Néanmoins, une image peinte peut ( et doit ) être *toujours* envisagée de ces trois points de vue : *iconique*, dans ce qu'elle donne à voir, une idée-forme ; *indiciaire*, à cause de ce qu'elle comporte de matière physique du fait de son exécution (une forme matérielle : la facture au moyen des empreintes du travail, épaisseur de la couche, etc.), et *symbolique* (sa signification) par un contenu sémantique qu'on lui accorde en mettant en rapport ces trois niveaux. Ainsi :



Si l'on cherchait encore d'autres images peintes qui rassemblent assez convenablement ces trois niveaux tels que se présentent dans le diagramme ci-dessus, nous les trouverions — comme je l'ai fait noter ailleurs (2003) —, chez quelques peintres, notamment du XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle européen. Il suffit d'aller voir le vieux Titien, et, ensuite, Rembrandt ou Vélasquez.

Prenons donc *Les Ménines*, cette sorte d'*hypoicône* de référence. Ayant là une iconicité forte, ce tableau est d'abord une *image* dans le sens de Peirce, tout aussi bien qu'une *forme* dans celui de Panofsky. Mais étant une présence en même temps qu'une représentation, c'est-à-dire donnant à voir l'image-empreinte d'un travail (*peinture*) aussi bien que la représentation (*tableau*) de quelques figures rangées selon un certain rapport dans un espace de fiction, cette image devient par la suite, du côté de la présence, un vrai *diagramme*. En outre, il est évident qu'il y a encore dans cette œuvre un contenu sémantique — au sens de Panofsky — qui dépasse la simple représentation des choses (salon du palais, personnages avec le chien, le peintre à son chevalet, etc.) pour entrer dans l'ordre du symbolique que Peirce appelle, au niveau de l'*hypoicône*, *métaphore*.

Tenant compte alors du schéma ci-dessus, si l'hypoiconicité, celle des *images*, *diagrammes* et *métaphores*, est repérable avec une certaine aisance dans une grande partie des tableaux du XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle, que ce soit Vélasquez, Rembrandt ou d'autres, et cela, du fait même de sa très forte iconicité qui ne dissimule les traces de production,

participant ainsi aux qualités des surfaces, le mot icône, l'iconisme, devrait être gardé peut-être pour d'autres formes visuelles, comme celles d'une peinture très faiblement figurative, plus proche de l'abstraction, voire même carrément abstraite, et pour cela même plus proche d'une représentation par suggestion que par figuration, tel qu'on le voit, par exemple, chez Ernst, Klee, De Kooning et tant d'autres.

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### Notes

<sup>1</sup> «Un *Signe* est un Representamen avec un Interpretant mental» (II. 274).

<sup>2</sup> « Or une *qualité* est une conscience. Je ne dis pas une conscience *réveillée* — mais, quand même, quelque chose de la nature de la conscience. Peut-être une conscience *dormante*. // Alors une possibilité, ou potentialité, est une *teinte* [ou une nuance] particulière de conscience» (VI. 221).

<sup>3</sup> *Vid.* cette différence chez Platon (*Sophiste* 240a-c) et Augustin, p. e. (*Soliloques* X.18).

<sup>4</sup> Ma traduction : « Une Icône est un Representamen dont la Qualité Représentative est une Priméité première (ou de l'ordre du Premier). [ ... ] Un Representamen par Priméité seule ne peut avoir qu'un Objet similaire. Mais un Signe par Contraste dénote son objet seulement au moyen d'un contraste, ou Secondéité, entre deux qualités. Un signe par Priméité est une image de son objet et, pour parler plus strictement, ne peut être qu'une *idée*. Toutefois, l'idée qu'il doit produire est un Interpretant, et une idée est excitée par un objet extérieur au moyen d'une réaction au cerveau. Or, en parlant plus strictement, l'idée non plus, sauf au sens d'une possibilité, ou Priméité, ne peut pas être une icône. Une possibilité seule est une Icône purement par sa qualité, et son objet ne peut être qu'une Priméité. Alors un signe peut être iconique, c'est-à-dire qu'il peut représenter son objet principalement par sa similitude, indépendamment de sa façon d'être. Si nous voulons un substantif, un representamen iconique peut être dénommé *hypoicône*. // Toute sorte d'image physique, ainsi qu'une peinture, est très conventionnelle dans son mode de représenter; mais en elle même, sans titre ou inscription peut être appelé *hypoicône* ».

<sup>5</sup> « Un signe peut servir comme signe parce qu'il ressemble seulement à son objet [c'est l'icône]. Cette ressemblance sera alors son sens interne (*internal meaning*). Mais l'on ne dira pas qu'il a un sens externe quelconque (*any external meaning*) sauf à représenter quelque chose manifestement, car si cela se produisait (*if it did*) ce serait une manière de signifier son objet, non purement par la ressemblance . »

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