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GOD & SELF

C.S. Peirce's logical icons

We think with signs. In the course of the twentieth century neurosciences have explored the chemical and physical aspects of this sign production in the brain. Great neuro-physiologists, particularly John C. Eccles (Nobel Price for medicine 1963) and Robert W. Sperry (Nobel Price for medicine 1981) have paved the way to neurosemiotics. The ongoing research in that specific field of neurology keeps challenging the boundaries of our knowledge of the human brain.

In the epistemology of the "open conversation" of modern time's hermeneutics, the semiotic "tools" of C.S. Peirce, the basic principles of his symbolic logic, if not the sophisticated neological ramifications of his system, have been one of the landmark of pragmatism. Peirce's basic triad of *icon*, *index* and *symbol* has been adapted by a majority of scholars in philosophy and psychology and they are now common ground in any field of research having to do with signs. The realistic views of pragmatism challenge the idealistic tradition in the field of meaning. Hermeneutics, having been modeled after the mimetic poetics, in the fashion of a treasure hunt, as the upstream journey the author's intended meaning, now turns away from myth towards the physical event of catharsis. Meaning doesn't have to be dug out of the past; it is constructed to be used in the future.

The pragmatics of reception becomes the ground level of any theory of representation. Actors have now to know more about the "customers" in the seats of the theater than the "poet" who wrote the text their part is taken from. Theatergoers and actors belong to the same world, they attend the same event. The author might be present; he or she is not an issue for a catharsis orientated spectator. The "person" who wrote the lines the actors perform now belongs to another world, a mythical world of pure symbol. But some people have had enough of symbols, they go the theater, or any other art form for that matter, in search of vision; they want to experience events happening in front of them as if they were taking part of it. The imagination of such contemplative or *ecstatic spectators* take over the reasoning. In order to see and hear real things the cathartic oriented spectator has to let go of his obsession with a logical solution.

Some other go to the theater in search of comforting memories and human bounding or moral counsel, for them the violence of logic is preferable than the self indulging pleasure of compassion or fear; they are *heroic spectators* who hide the fear by knowing the ending in advance, they feel they

are the guardians of the moral order or the cultural squad. They feel uneasy with a non-concluding argument. In the field of thinking, especially in the metaphoric theater of the brain, there is a tendency to have the last word; fortunately there is also in human thinking a tendency to open up freely to any new experience. Some spectators are looking for explanations and some others for sensations.

In order to bridge the gap between idealism and realism, the semiotic study of brain activity has now to link together some very appropriate propositions from the field of neurosciences and some of the basic data of sign systems research.

neurosciences:

- 1) each one of the brain hemispheres have specific functions
- 2) each one of the brain hemispheres can work on its own (intra-hemispherical relations)
- 3) the two hemispheres can work together (inter-hemispherical relations)

semiotics:

- 4) *icons* representing by virtue of resemblance;
- 2) *indexes* representing by virtue of physical contact or causality;
- 5) *symbols* representing by virtue of a law.

Knowing what signs are and mostly how they work is a very useful knowledge, it certainly helps to keep a meaningful contact with two millennia of idealistic ideology, but the semiotics of thinking must now put aside the confrontation between essentialists, who believe the Self exists as an entity independent from the brain, and the hard line materialists who believe the Self is but a mental representation of the brain.

The new task of semiotics is to show that all of these opponents, believers and deniers of the Self's existence, may be right. In the overall conversation of "thinkers" in the world today there must be a second choice that is not border crossing, a true third voice. Discovering the illusionnistic nature of the Ego doesn't necessarily mean you deny its existence, no more than saying that the spirit is a certain "state of energy" or a "field of possibilities" implies there is no difference between mind and matter.

We use signs. But even if we admit that man creates God in his resemblance, we do not necessarily deny the existence of the Unthinkable. The more we reduce the Unthinkable to a concept, the less we can visualize or hear "him" or It. The same for the Self, the more we use it, the more we believe in it, the less we need the realistic revelation of its illusionistic nature. As signs, God and the Self, function as logical icons; as spiritual "beings" whose existence is determined by the brain activity they function as analogical icons, they feed on emotions.

The mental signs can only be described in comparison with the signs we see, hear, smell or touch. We use logical signs or concepts for analytical thinking, those are conventional signs of essence or symbols; and we use analogical signs or images for imaginative thinking; these are indexes, contextual or physical signs of existence. Both the conventional symbol and the physical index rely on a basic iconical sign. Iconicity in a sign is a *firstness* as Peirce would put it. In mental activity, it can be used in a logical way, every time a mind tries to reach a certain order in meaning. In such an icon "the likeness is aided by conventional rules" (2.279).

"An icon is a representamen whose Representative Quality is a Firstness of it as a First" (2.276)

The examples of logical icon given by C.S. Peirce are a diagram and an algebraic sign. The user must master the knowledge of certain categories, "numbers", "operations", before he can think of a specific sign. But the kind of iconicity used in symbolization is different than the iconicity used in indexicalization. The illustrating mind, using imaginative and somatic thinking, visualize forms that look like the objects they represent in the process of indexicalization. This kind of sign we shall call the *analogical icon*: in such a sign iconicity is not used to limit the possibilities of meaning, like in the logical icon, but it is used as a distributional device, to enhance the meaning by proliferation of "interpretants".

To establish the likeness between a sign and its object, the mind has to compare the two. Comparing things with the intention of sorting out the *one* that fits the topic is quite different from comparing with the intention of giving an example, opening out to multiple interpretations. When we're trying to give a clear description of something or have a clear grasp of it, we tend to

limit the number of adequate interpretants. As the reasoning realist sees it, we start with the *particulars* and round them up in a categorical sign of essence, a general idea or *universal (katholon)*. We shall refer to these bonding signs as logical icons.

What we shall call the analogical icon is a sign of existence. It belongs to the second class of signs, "those by physical connection". (2.281) Analogical icons are used every time someone adds a sign of physical contact, a personal feeling, to a conventional sign. In the kind of thinking where the illustrative mind, starting with the general idea, builds by adding *particulars*; we tend to let go the proliferation of interpretants.

The logical icon is a sign of essence. It helps the discursive mind to focus.

"in the syntax of every language there are logical icons of the kind that are aided by conventional rules" (2.280).

We use the logical icon to infer from likeness. But the resemblance here between the sign and its object is "not at all in looks; it is only in respect to the relations of their parts that their likeness consists". The icon of such likeness is an "array", like an algebraical equation, "it *exhibits* (...) the relations of the quantities concerned" (2.282)

The logical icon is a sub-linguistic categorical sign that has a distributional function: among the possible beings, one human being, conventionally referred to as a person. The personal pronoun that refers to the actual speaker or to the person he or she refers to is the indexical part of the logical icon in order to use the logical icon "person", in real life or in imaginary conversations, there must be an experience of speech and vision.

The logical icon "person" helps the critical mind to produce a concept (conceptual set of signs) of the Self. The Self as symbol of the whole of the individual human being, or person, is a conventional sign; it refers to the unified consciousness.

When we assume that the person is one, we make an inference, and when this inference leads to a belief, it gives way to a thinking process called myth. We use the illustrating activity of the holistic thinking as if it were symbolic. When we imagine the features of a fictional person, a "person" we refer to in our reflective mind, and we give symbolic value to mental indexes in order to have more pleasure imagining this person. We use the demonstrative activity of the

analytical and reflective thinking as if it were indexical material. The belief in the Self is a very good example of a *myth*. It wouldn't occur if there wasn't first a failed use of symbol. The thinker referring to himself as "I" cannot prove the actual existence of this unity of consciousness he feels as one, most of the time anyway; he fails to verify the validity of the Self as a universal sign of the unified consciousness. He ends up inferring its existence in order to believe in "him"-Self. To have a good opinion of one's Self is to "narcotize" self-criticism, to avoid verification in the search of self esteem.

The Self as symbol of the whole of the individual human being, or person, is a conventional sign of the unified consciousness. The logical icon helps the critical mind to produce a concept (conceptual set of signs) of the Self. And since the wholeness of the Self cannot be proven, it has to be felt.

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Technically speaking the mental process called inference is a symbolization. It implies the use of symbols, just saying the word "house" is to use a symbol, but symbolization also establishes a logical link between the symbols and the categorical signs implied in speaking. The result of symbolization is metaphor. If someone uses the word "house" referring to a kind of music and you didn't know about it, you would miss the point because you don't know the law. In the mind of the speaker referring to house music symbolization takes place; in the mind of the bewildered person left out of "it", there is only verbal use of a symbol: the word "house".

Discursive or critical thinking occurs chiefly in the left hemisphere of the human brain; it involves analysis or verification, when the analyzing has been done previously. From a semiotic point of view, this part of thinking is mostly symbolic; it is used in reasoning counting or demonstrating. The intra-hemispherical relations of the left brain excludes indexes. As it concentrates on abstraction, analytical thinking has no use of "physical" signs; it charges indexes into logical icons. You can think about something without visualizing it by using a mental device. With practice, you get very good at it, and very quick. You control so well your reasoning ability that you can let go of the logical control in order to be had by images and obtain an intense feeling. Suspension of disbelief is proportionate to the pleasure of catharsis. That is when myth occurs.

From a rationalistic point of view, symbolization is the main conquest of the human mind, but the submissive mind or somatic thinking has also to be

taken in account if we want to reflect on the whole of thinking, including emotions and mental states that are not discursive, non-analytical thinking.

When the *discursive mind* let go of analytical thinking, or at least some process like verification, and gives in to the overwhelming wholeness of an image or a feeling, the *holistic mind*, take over and, through the process we shall refer to as *myth*, it allows the discursive mind to work with its silent partner. The intra-hemispherical activity of the holistic mind is basically the index producing somatic thinking. Through different channels, signs that have no resemblance to anything recorded by the senses and stocked in the memory, like a baby's dreams or the luminous dots one sees behind shot lids, are exchanged between the symbol specialized left brain and the index specialized right brain. When there is an inter-hemispherical collaboration, somatic thinking works its way through imaginative and reflective thinking and gives us mental vision.

Myth is a mental preparation for belief. The discursive mind infers the existence of someone or something and the holistic mind uses this non-verified symbolic data to reach a sense of wholeness. A "sense" is not something you can easily describe with symbols; it is thinking with images and emotions. The balance of the human brain needs its fair share of such "physical" signs. When we have no workable concepts to satisfy the need for clarity and order in the discursive mind, we turn to myth, our inference leads then to belief in the Whole. But when our opinion becomes more important to us than the truth they stand for, the unbalanced mind tends to exaggerate the factualness of what symbols refer to. Someone believing that buildings called "houses" got their name from a kind of music are, first and for all not very well informed, but chiefly what we shall call a myth user. The misuse of myth can lead to excessive symbolization. The myth of science as sole access to truth, for instance, leads to a mongruous piling of documents.

Myth is a useful way to have access to ones imagination without having to go through the many censoring gates of reasoning. It can become the stepping stone of the believer: the blinding of Oedipus is the consequence of too much reasoning.

1. use of symbole

to use the word "house" in it's first conventional meaning

2. symbolisation

to use the word "house" referring to a kind of music

3. myth.

to believe the building called "house" gets its name
from a kind of music

1. use of index

visualisation of a form

2. indexicalisation

illustration of a symbole

3. allegory