

Significação e design

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ABSTRACT

Signification is a social practice which produces and reproduces meanings, the result of that being the sign (*signum facere*), artificial semantic differences constructed by predicative subjects of a cultural formation. In order for the designer to be able to formulate relevant design solutions, he/she has to reject what is considered already known, as well as a prioristic premises, dichotomized positions and reductive definitions. That will allow him/her to think creatively about his/her practical problems. Innovative solutions do not follow the excludent philosophy of *either/or* but adopt instead the inclusiveness of *this and that*, something that seems to explain the closeness of contemporary design philosophies to Peirce's semiotics, which is what this paper aims to show.

KEYWORDS: Signification. Semiotics. Design. Peirce.

Peirce used to say that a prioristic, axiomatic definitions are of little help in confronting experience, since material feelings, things and events cannot be categorized in pigeon-holes and arranged in a coherent, rigid, permanent, philosophical structure once and forever. For, according to his triadic semiotic method, everything is capable of being connected with everything else; and because, according to his philosophical beliefs, the universe is always changing.

When elaborating on semiosis, from the psychologists's viewpoint, which he referred to as that of "association of ideas", Peirce stressed the main ways by which he saw signification proceeding. He wrote:

The association of ideas is said to proceed according to three principles — those of *resemblance*, of *contiguity*, and of *causality*. But it would be equally true to say that signs denote what they do on the three principles of resemblance, contiguity, and causality. There can be no question that anything is a sign of whatever is associated with it by resemblance, by contiguity, or by causality: nor can there be any doubt that any sign recalls the thing signified. So, then, the association of ideas consists in this, that a judgement occasions another judgement, of which it is the sign. Now this is nothing less nor more than inference." (PEIRCE, 1955, p. 245-246, my italics)

Peirce saw association of ideas as resulting from the action of "a gentle force which commonly prevails" (PEIRCE, 1931-1958, v. 7, p 250), which we notice most obviously in "suggestions" (that is, generic inferences) based, as he wrote later on, in resemblance and contiguity (PEIRCE, 1931-1958, v.7, p. 250-251). Peirce sometimes also employed the word *causality* in his writings, and he had initially postulated it as being a third way of associating ideas (c.1868). But subsequently he refer to causality as *symbolism*, and concentrated most of his attention to contiguity and similarity. Thus, as Peirce put it later on:

Suggestions of these two kinds [resemblance and contiguity] characterize not merely dreams and dreamy meditations, but also thoughts referred to the real world, or in technical language *categorical judgements*. Association is the only force which exists within the intellect, and whatever power of controlling the thoughts there may be can be exercised only by utilizing these forces ... These unconscious and uncontrolled reasonings hardly merit that name; although they are very often truer than if they were regulated by an imperfect logic, showing in this the usual superiority of instinct over reason, and of practice over theory. They take place like other mental suggestions according to the two principles of similarity and connection in experience. (PEIRCE, 1931-1958, v.7, p. 276)

He also seem to have figured out *symbolic signs* as being equivalent to typical classes or circles, which could change their place, as well as their interconnections, in a dynamic mental network, or *system of ideas*. For Peirce also envisaged, like Saussure, the existence of a complex system of signs or ideas being activated by signification, with the difference that such a system was *private* and *dynamic*, probably due to the singular plurality of his own

training and formation (which included, among other scientific practices, logic, mathematics, physics and chemistry). He wrote, in that respect: “Suggestion by *contiguity* means that when an idea is familiar to us as part of a *system of ideas*, that idea may call the system to our minds, and from *the system*, one of the other ideas may, for some reason, detach itself and come to be thought of by itself [...]” (PEIRCE, 1931-1958, v.7, p. 251, my italics).

“Suggestion by *resemblance* is easily enough understood, as soon as the conception is once grasped that the similarity of two ideas consists in the fact that the mind naturally joins them in thought in a certain way [...] “ (PEIRCE, 1931-1958, v.7, p. 251).

“Now, two ideas are *compared* only in the idea of the *class, lot, or set* to which they belong; and they act *alike* only in so far as they have one and the same relation to that connecting idea [...] “ (PEIRCE, 1931-1958, v.7, p. 252, my italics).

“As experience clusters certain ideas into sets, so does the mind too....These sets have various forms of connection [...]” (PEIRCE, 1931-1958, v.7, p. 252).

[...] by virtue of the occult working of the depths within us,..two feelings coalesce into one notion. For the sake of calling this by a familiar name, I call this association by similarity. But the ideas united by virtue of an occult inward power, are not always regarded as *similar*. Contraries are also joined. [But] Ideas and feelings are so joined which are neither merely declared by the mind to be *similar* nor to be *contrary*. Such, for instance, are length, breadth, and thickness [*contiguous* concepts] ... In general, what the mind pronounces is that the feeling or idea of yesterday and that of today belong to one system, of which it forms a conception. A concept is not a mere jumble of particulars — that is only its crudest species. A concept is the living influence upon us of a diagram, or icon, with whose several parts are connected in thought and equal number of feelings or ideas. The law of mind is that *feelings and ideas attach themselves in thought so as to form systems.*” (PEIRCE, 1931-1958, v.7, p. 283, my italics)

As we know, Peirce’s notion of one’s mental semiotic system included not only conventional concepts (*symbols*) but feelings as well (motivated by *emotions* and *experiences*). As we recall, the most widely known contribution of Peirce to semiotics, his classification of signs into the three categories of *icons*, *indices*, and *symbols*, are also dependent upon those two basic types of motivated associations, *similarity* and *contiguity*, plus *symbolic* or conventional associations, which he saw as *imputed* to the subject, either due to repetitive associations prescribed by his/her community, or acquired by force of a habit, or resulting from inborn instinct (PEIRCE, 1955, p. 113). We also recall that symbolic or conventional relations are, ultimately, all those personal and interpersonal *historical* relations of contiguity and similarity which have become demotivated: one “naturally” knows them, but ignores their origins or motivations. As Hodge

& Kress have observed, “A dogmatic assertion that signs are all and equally “arbitrary” is unjustifiable and unhelpful for general semiotics ...the doctrine of the arbitrariness of the sign expresses, in a marked form and by negation, the principle of the social determination of the sign [...]” (HODGE ; KRESS, 1988, p. 22). And, we should add, the notion of the “arbitrariness of signs” also represses the historical, ideological dimension of the process which produces them.

It is also possible to infer from Peirce’s writings that both *identity* and *opposition* were the *associative* relations, or *symbolic* relationships, activated through symbols. For Peirce also recognized that to identify something as a sign is necessarily to recognize, first of all, what makes it *opposed* to, or *different* from other signs, that is, what makes it to contrast with other signs, what confers on it its “character”. For Peirce also remarked that:

A thing without oppositions *ipso facto* does not exist ... [the conception of being through opposition is] essential to an individual thing or subject, but also to an individual fact [...] Two drops of water retain each its identity and opposition to the other no matter in what or in how many respects they are alike [...] *existence lies in opposition merely*. (PEIRCE, 1931-1958, v.2, p. 248-249, my italics)

Therefore, knowing or identifying something requires *opposing* a permanent reaction to it. As he said: “*All determination is by negation* ; we can first recognize any character only by putting an object which possesses it into comparison with an object which possesses it not [...]” (PEIRCE, 1955, p. 240, my italics).

“[...] Wherever there is identity there is necessarily *otherness*; and in whatever field there is true otherness there is necessarily *identity*.” (PEIRCE, 1931-1958, v.1, p. 204, my italics).

Peirce tried to account for *opposition* under the rubric of similarity, although he recognized that conjunction of contraries is “not always regarded as *similar*” (PEIRCE, 1931-1958, v.7, p. 283). His observation makes sense, because we usually compare or contrast things with each other in terms of several relevant *same* sensorial dimensions, while assuming other variables constant or non-relevant to the comparing. On the other hand, we do not simply make “neutral” comparisons, for we are always evaluating, punctuating the differences we have observed. For such comparisons and evaluations involve both our imaginary (sensorial images of all kinds) and our symbolic (ideological categorizations) dimensions as well, requiring us to take up a *thetic* position for predication: either we situate ourselves on one or on the other side of a significant divide (accepting the divide), or else we refuse the posited difference (rejecting the divide), constructing another one.

In effect, as traditional philosophy, classical logic, Freudian

psychoanalysis, Peirce's semiotics, Lacanian theories, Derrida's *différance*, and Kristeva's *semanalysis* have pointed out, any identification or affirmation of identity is an affirmation of a being (an ego) which necessarily requires a reaction to it, or its *negation* (a *non-ego*), that is, a correspondent opposition to itself (an *otherness*) in order for the consciousness of *being* to be possible.

To say "I think, therefore I am" is not enough for one to come into being, as Peirce insisted all the time, for any "I" requires an "other", a "not-I" to support his/her existence. All predications require a predicating *subject*, a copula (a connective verb) and an explicit or implicit predicated *object*. For any predication whatsoever is based upon the simultaneous affirmation of one identity and the recognition of *another* complementary entity, which may or may not be explicitly identified. If the supporting or complementary *other* is not explicitly recognized, it remains simply a repressed *complement*, a generic *negation*, a "not-X" or "nonX"; on the other hand, if its existence is explicitly recognized, in the form of a specific "Y" located in the generic territory of "not-X", then "Y" is said to be the *contrary* or the *opposite* of the term "X" (see COPI 1986, p. 183).

A figure can only exist against a background; every positive mark requires a negative support; all action necessitates a supportive reaction; each consciousness requires a complementary unconsciousness; every signifier requires an associated signified; form begs content, etc. This is what is called complementarity or the interdependence of contraries (when the *other* of the *being* is named).

In symbolic logic, the domains of identity and negation or opposition, of the ego and its complementary *non-ego* or *other*, appear in diagrammatic form as follows (see, for instance, ALLWOOD; ANDERSON; DAHL, 1977; and COPI 1986):

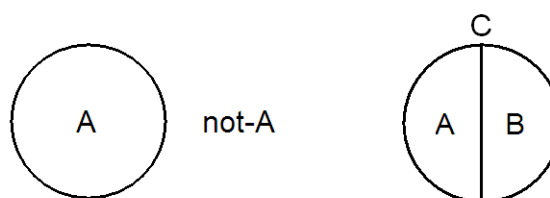


Figure 1 - Complementary signs (A and not-A) and opposite signs (A and B)

In the case of the ego which comes into being, A is usually seen as the domain of the subject and not-A as the rest of the universe. But we can have the reverse situation as well: A, the ego domain, could be posited as being in the area outside the

circumference, and not-A, the other, as being inside it.

The division of a whole in two, like in the second diagram in the above figure, where not-A is restricted to the domain B, correspond to that situation when not-A is restricted to an explicit, restricted area B of the universe, such that A and its complement are now seen as opposite parts of a wider class, or set, or field C (represented by the whole area delimited by the circumference). Such a situation corresponds in logic to a *disjunction*, which is any proposition affirming that “If any S is in C, it is either a A or a B”, where S is the subject of the proposition.

In relation to the first diagram in Figure 1, we could say that the first alternative for positioning the ego (A inside the circumference vs not-A in the outside of it) means one sees itself surrounded by the total environment, and dissociated from it, but does not realize any specific correlation to an other. This first alternative, it seems to us, could represent the way a specific minority sees its-self being oppressed by a powerful, generic, faceless majority, that is, by the rest of the sociocultural formation. It might also represent the way in which some designers imagine themselves in relation to their practice, when they feel constrained by generic sociocultural forces and demands, by overwhelming pressures and demands of the public opinion, in an imaginary situation of isolation from it, which could also explain why such modernist designers see themselves engaged in a titanic, heroic practice of resistance to “their” demands, and in a constant struggle to make their own preferences to prevail. In such a situation very little dialogue occurs between the designer and “the others”, for he/she feels that concessions cannot be made, since the space reserved for doing his/her own thing seems to be already too restricted. The designer feels as if he/she were a marginalized artist or genius whose task were to enlighten the rest of his/her “society”.

The complementary alternative for positioning one-self, in that first case (A outside the circumference, not-A inside it) corresponds perhaps to an ego seeing its-self as an omnipotent, independent “master”, which has not yet realized his dependence on a specific “slave”, the other still being a very small complement, a nuisance under his control and government. This second alternative could correspond to the identification of the ego with an imaginary generic majority, whose consensual actions seem to be negated by only a small, generic minority of the entire “society”. Such situation, in design practice, could correspond perhaps to that of overconfident, non-dissenting designers which imagine themselves just responding to the generic design needs of their “society”, with only a few and sporadic dissenting pockets opposing “what common-sense dictates”. In such a situation, there is,

again, little dialogue going on between the designer and others, because he/she “already knows” what others want, since they are all “like” him/herself.

In relation to the second diagram in Figure 1, on the other hand, we have the situation when both “master” and “slave”, the ego and the other, have finally recognized each other by name and as interdependent complements of each other. It could correspond to that situation when one realizes that he/she is neither part of a majority nor part of a minority, but simply part of a wider network of heterogeneous social relations, or of a dynamic sociocultural system, which, at any specific moment, is actualized through oppositional situations, requiring him/her to take decisions and make options in dichotomized, confrontational, temporary ways. He/she accepts traditional dualistic positions of meaning and constantly tries to promote the superiority of his/her own half-side in any situation. That diagram could be seen as representing the “master-slave” dialectic used by Lacan to illustrate his ideas of how relations between gender, and other social relationships are constructed by the symbolic order for its subjects. That situation could thus correspond to the habitual view of design practice as a practice of dynamic, multiple confrontations between *opposing desires and strategies*: designer vs client, client & designer vs consumers, designer & consumers vs client, client & consumers vs designer, client & designer & consumer vs others (ecological groups, religious groups, the media, the government, other formations — Apple community vs Microsoft community — etc). There is confrontation, or asymmetric dialogue in such situations, for one side is usually already in dominance and tries to affirm its power over the other side which, of course, tries to invert that asymmetry.

But there is another further alternative for positioning one’s ego in that situation, which corresponds to the sudden realization by oppositional sides, locked in an impasse or in a never ending battle, that they might have a same goal in common which renders their former disputes irrelevant. That usually occurs when they both realize that they depend on each other’s existence for their own survival, that a solidary and dialogical approach could bring much more advantages to both parties, and that their struggle is not against each other but against hegemonic stereotypes which have put them into such an artificial confrontation. The appearance of such an alternative could correspond to extreme, emergent, dramatic, and pedagogical situations, which make both subjects, sides, or parties, suddenly realize that they had been taking for granted their “natural” incompatibilities and rivalries for too long, that they had repeatedly assumed such positioning without ever questioning, in the first place, the validity of the

definitions which informed it.

What neither the *ego* nor the *other* usually perceive is that such oppositional impasses have a history, that they have been produced by an initial symbolic split of the domain of being or acting of the subject, by an interested, motivated Other which remains apparently invisible. But its signs are always already there. For instance, in textual as well as mental representations, the Other of divisive, non-dialogical ideologies usually takes the form of closed lines and closed spaces, which separate and privilege pertinent “insides” from irrelevant “outsides”, texts from their contexts, essences from supplements, form from substance, reality from fantasy, reason from emotion, etc, which demarcate imaginary, mutually exclusive entities, territories, domains, or “patterns” for signification.

If we are able to realize that all divisions are artificial constructions promoted by material, ideological practices of sociocultural formations, then, and only then, can we hope to be able to find significant solutions for chronic problems, acting productively as conscious social subjects. For we have to systematically reject the taken-for-granted, a priori assumptions, static and immutable positions, narrow-minded definitions, in order to be able to think creatively about any problem. We have to realize that no problem should ever be posited in reductionistic, binaristic terms, in terms of either this or that. For dichotomized thinking is an impoverished, simplistic way of dealing with complex realities. Practical situations are much better approached when we take into account both “this” and “that”.

Then we begin to perceive that the real problem we face is altogether different: the basic problem is always how to escape from logocentric dichotomies. We should always look for the dichotomizing Other and pluralize it, put it into a dynamic context, in confrontation with several alternative Others, in order to dissolve its monopolistic, repressive, and tyrannical rule.

The presence of the Other, for instance, in the above diagrams, is represented by a static closed line which, in the first case separates an “inside” from an “outside”, and which in the second case separates the “left side or hemisphere” from the “right side or hemisphere” (as if those two halves could represent the “whole situation”). The logocentric Other, the true master of dualistic dialectics, survives through such apparently democratic, balanced splittings. For “divide and rule” is the lemma of the oppressive Other, present in many ideologies.

The Other, the Lacanian privileged signifier, the “phallus” representative of the Law, The-Name-of-the-Father, or power, is a privileged (Peircean) interpretant. But all signs can be put into semiosis, as we know — that is, the logocentric Other can be

displaced by Other pluralistic interpretants, provided we contradict or make problematic any pre-given “either-or” totalizing predication.

As Peirce, Freud, logicians and grammarians had already realized, much before Lacan, any signifying process or system requires at least the presence of *three* terms, in order to start producing meanings:

- a) a sign (or signifier), an object (or signified) of the sign, and an (evaluative) interpretant;
- b) unconscious sensations, conscious thoughts, and pre-conscious mediating processes;
- c) a subject, a predicate, and a copula;
- d) a major term, a minor term, and a middle term;
- e) a predicating ego, its other, and the mediating Other.

It is worth noticing, however, that Lacan theories also reveal binaristic tendencies, for, among other significant reductionistic moves, he got rid of the interpretive preconscious system postulated by Freud.

According to Freud (1986, p. 178-182), the unconscious system of the subject was basically a dynamic network of affective visual, tactile, acoustic, etc, memory-traces of things and events that the subject has been in contact with, traces which are capable of entering into *condensation* and *displacement*, the two primary “discursive” processes of that system. Unconscious representations are presented to our conscious system after being regulated by the preconscious system, which is responsible for both the “translation” and the simultaneous “censorship” of our unconscious articulations (SILVERMAN, 1983, p. 61). The primary processes of signification of our unconscious do not “respect” logical boundaries, constantly collapsing so called “normal”, rational symbolic oppositions between signs, preferring to be motivated instead by their material, affective and experiential relations of similarities and contiguities.

Freud (1986, p. 178-182) saw the *preconscious system* as a “rational” network of interconnected symbol-presentations (or *word-presentations* as he called them), made up of sound-images, motor speech-images, visual reading-images, motor reading-images, visual writing-images, motor writing-images, etc — that is, as a strict, disciplined network of *learned* patterns we need for communicating (in listening, speaking, reading, writing, etc). The preconscious system, still according to Freud, regulates and controls our *unconscious* wishes, submitting them to the civilizing constraints of our sociocultural formation. The preconscious system thus includes the processes which effect the binding of those affective traces of our unconscious with those regular communicational symbols, in their various verbal moda-

lities (graphic, acoustic, kinetic, etc), as well as the subjection of those affective/symbolic connections, or cathexes, to acceptable discursive patterns, as prescribed by *conventional* relations of signification (based on identity/opposition relationships). In short, the preconscious system seems to be a “place” or “site” where affective/symbolic representations are articulated through conventional relations and syntactic operations which connect traces of sensorial signifiers with sociocultural signifying patterns.

As Freud put it:

A word is thus a complex presentation consisting of the images enumerated above; or, to put it in another way, there corresponds to the word a complicated associative process into which the elements of visual, acoustic and kinaesthetic origin enumerated above [signifying patterns or conventional communicational images] enter together. A word, however, acquires its *meaning* by being linked to an “object-presentation”, in all cases, if we restrict ourselves to a consideration of substantives. The object-presentation itself is once again a complex of associations made up of the greatest variety of visual, acoustic, tactile, kinaesthetic and other presentations [traces of sensorial signifiers]. Philosophy tell us that that an object-presentation consists in nothing more than this — that the appearance of there being a “thing” to whose various “attributes” [signifieds] these *sense-impressions* [signifiers] bear witness is merely due to the fact that, in enumerating the sense-impressions which we have received from an object, we also assume the possibility of there being a large number of *further impressions* [additional interpretant signifiers] in the same chain of associations. The object-presentation [the sensorial signifier] is thus seen to be one which is *not closed* and almost one which *cannot be closed*, while the word-presentation [the classic, formal sign] is seen to be something *closed*, even though *capable of extension*. (FREUD, 1986, p. 182, my italics)

According to Freud, thus, the unconscious system can only communicate indirectly with the conscious system, by linking some of its repressed, affective mnemonic traces (“thing-presentations” or “object-presentations” or sensorial signifiers), produced by past as well as incoming stimuli (of a visual, acoustic, olfactory, tactile, gustatory nature), with conventional signifying patterns (Peircean symbols), of a graphic, verbal, gestural, kinaesthetic nature, “stored” in the intermediate preconscious system:

[...] the *conscious* presentation comprises the presentation of the thing [signifier] plus the presentation of the word [signified] belonging to it, while the *unconscious* presentation is the presentation of the thing alone. The system *Ucs.* [the unconscious] contains the thing-cathexes [mnemonic-traces or sensorial signifiers, charged with affective value] of the objects, the first and true object-cathexes [historical, external objects invested with affective value by the subject]. The system *Pcs.* [the preconscious] comes about by this thing-presentation being hypercathexed through being linked with the word-presentations corresponding to it.” (FREUD, 1986, p. 172, my italics)

Thus, according to Freud, we have two mental systems participating in signification, one *unconscious*, to which we do not have direct access, made out of affective sensorial traces produced by emotionally relevant things or events with which the subject interacts and has interacted with in the past, and another one

preconscious, to which we can gain access in general thinking, and which relates those traces with conventional signifying patterns or conventional symbols (of a verbal, visual, gestural, etc, nature — (see SILVERMAN, 1983, p. 54-55).

The *preconscious* is thus an interpretant system which is somehow closed but capable of extension, as Freud said above. That is, it is capable of being expanded and transformed. For we can and do change our habitual ways of thinking, behaving, writing, speaking, drawing, dancing, cooking, etc, along our lives. Thus, the *preconscious* system has to be a two-way gate-keeper system, constantly receiving feedback about the effect of our actions in the environment as well as being affected by it through our conscious system. It is a censor that can be made to change its mind, a translator which can be corrected, an interpreter which can be made to change perspectives.

Thus, as Freud also perceived it, meaning is an effect of a production, of a process, which correlates material, affective sensorial traces with conventional, memorized, habitual spatio-temporal patterns. That process, which cathezes or invests emotional value to any symbolic discourse of the subject, is motivated by unconscious wishes of the subject or, more precisely, by his/her subjective desires. The aim of our intellectual processes, thus, is not the satisfaction of undifferentiated physical appetite produced by biological instincts (Lacan's "need"), but rather the fulfilment of a permanent lack (Lacan's "desire") produced by our specific sociocultural condition, or subjectivity (SILVERMAN, 1983, p. 56).

Now, as Freud also remarked, negation is

[...] a way of taking cognizance of what is repressed; indeed it is already a lifting of the repression, though not, of course, an acceptance of what is repressed. We can see how in this the intellectual function is separated from the affective process...The outcome of this is a kind of intellectual acceptance of the repressed, while at the same time what is essential to the repression persists (FREUD, 1984, p. 438).

He also added that

To negate something in a judgement is, at bottom, to say: 'This is something which I should prefer to repress.' A *negative judgement* is the intellectual substitute for repression. With the help of the symbol of negation [no, not, don't, none], thinking frees itself from the restrictions of repression and *enriches itself* with material that is indispensable for its proper functioning" (FREUD, 1984, p. 438-39, my italics).

In other words, through negation our preferred Other takes cognizance of several repressed Others.

It seems that our *preconscious*, then, is not made up of only one Other, but several Others, which are kept under the control of a hegemonic but temporary and contradictory dominant

Other, which constructs and tries to maintain a basic, coherent “personality” or “character” for our egos, by constantly repressing other equally possible, but disturbing, interpretant Others. Most convincing actors, for instance, have learned how to switch from one Other to an Other according to the role they play. I believe that designers, in the same way as actors, are more productive and creative in their practice when they too become flexible, entering in a critical dialogue with Others (rules, laws, conventions) and *others* (concrete subjects), by avoiding to follow prescribed, stereotyped, unchangeable styles, formulas, and aesthetic principles, and instead discussing alternative viewpoints.

Saussure’s semiology was not dialogical. Even though he postulated that in signification *there are only differences without positive terms*, he also said that as soon as there is a sign (a word, a name, a pattern, or an identity) there is also (a supposedly static) automatic opposition between that sign and others. For, as he said, every sign opposes all the other signs in its (supposedly static) sign-system.

Fixed identities and oppositions is the basic principle of signification, according to Saussurean semiology and his structuralist followers. A principle which inspired most structuralists to search for *static* binary oppositions between *homogeneous* signs, in order to discover their underlying semiotic *static* “system”. Which, when “discovered”, it is then rendered asymmetrical by the predicating semiologist or structuralist, who cannot help projecting his/her subjective preferences, informed by his/her historical sociocultural values, onto one or the other term of the dichotomies he/she has “discovered” in the system.

What started as a search for relevant, discriminative sensorial features between signifiers, looking up for *differences* without positive terms, after a short while becomes *positivized* in the form of dogmatic sets of opposites or contraries, which later on produce asymmetric dualisms and power relations. So, the structuralist researcher is always already a dichotomized and asymmetric sign him/herself, due to the logocentrism which informs his/her thinking and his/her methods and his/her practices.

Qualities are not intrinsic, immutable, or essential attributes of signals, but rather imputed to them by the predicating subject, in consequence of a routine, of a more or less stable way of seeing, behaving, thinking, etc constructed into his/her head by a certain external, dominant, interpretant Other. An Other which is *ideo-logical*, and which is constantly put into *process/trial* by the semiotic environment of the subject, where representations informed by alternative Others contradict his/her Other. In democratic regimes of signification, we cannot avoid putting our Other in dialogue with Others.

The dialogical subject of signification realizes that certain privileged relations between signifiers are not eternal, essential or intrinsically more valuable than others, but simply more or less socially relevant and appropriate to his/her and others material survival, well-being, and happiness. The dialogical, democratic subject further realizes he/she too can make new significations, instead of passively using habitual ones, whenever he/she allows other Others to participate in his/her signifying practices too. But such an openness of mind requires one to realize first the subconscious, naturalized, blocking powers of his/her dominant Other, living both in his/her own preconscious structurations as well as in concrete, external representations of reality circulated by others sharing the same Other.

For instance, let us take a look at symbolic representations of traditional logic. Copi (1986) writes, in relation to those conventional circular diagramations used by books of logic, that they have to be taken seriously, because they

[...] constitute an iconic [basically emotional, according to Peirce] representation of the standard-form categorical [that is, dichotomized] propositions, in which spatial *inclusions* and *exclusions* [that is, static identities and oppositions; my italics] correspond to the non-spatial [thus temporal, historical] inclusions and exclusions of classes. They not only provide an exceptionally clear method of notation [or representation], but also *are the basis of the simplest and most direct method of testing the validity of categorical syllogisms* [that is, of passing ideo-logical judgements on subjects' arguments] [...] (COPi, 1986, p. 199).

Such diagrams represent for many people, in very graphic, "clear" terms, the way our so-called "rational thinking" works or *ought* to work, according an ancient ideo-logical Other. All graphic representations represent an Other in the last instance, turning our predications permanently visible and static, and they cannot be easily withdrawn or erased afterwards. They may persuade others of our arguments, but we should not forget that they also make our minds a prisoner of the represented Other. We might repress or forget a graphic representation, but only through much effort.

That is why recorded representations, notations, written texts, graphic signs in general have so great a power over subjects and their lives. Their articulations continue producing effects for a long time, independently of the wishes or desires of their "authors". Effects which, unlike those of spoken articulations, cannot be immediately sensed, evaluated and counteracted, if necessary, by additional statements of the subject him/herself or by others. Representations, especially when printed, or presented by some formal public medium, generally preclude dialogue.

On the other hand, subjects, consciously or not, are easily subjected to such "solid" representations, because they want to feel

secure, projecting their imaginary selves on apparent certainties. Or, in others circumstances, they want to believe that, by having constructed a widely circulated and influential representation of some reality, they can be the Other, in perfect control of the actions and thoughts of themselves and many others.

As Harvey (1989) sees it, in the architectural context, the role of representations in the construction of our subjective experiences of space and time should not be taken lightly:

From...[a] materialistic perspective we can then argue that objective conceptions of time and space are necessarily created through material practices and processes which serve to reproduce social life. The Plain Indians or the African Nuer objectify qualities of time and space that are as separate from each other as they are distant from those ingrained within a capitalist mode of production. The objectivity of time and space is given in each case by the material practices of social reproduction, and to the degree that these latter vary geographically and historically, so we find that social time and social space are differently constructed. Each distinctive mode of production or social formation will, in short, embody a distinctive bundle of time and space practices and concepts. Since capitalism has been (and continues to be) a revolutionary mode of production in which the material practices and processes of social reproduction are always changing, it follows that the objective qualities as well as the meanings of space and time also change. On the other hand, if advance of knowledge (scientific, technical, administrative, bureaucratic, and rational) is vital to the progress of capitalist production and consumption, then changes in our conceptual apparatus (including representations of space and time) can have material consequences for the ordinary of daily life. When, for example, a planner-architect like Le Corbusier, or an administrator like Haussman, creates a built environment in which the tyranny of the straight line predominates, then we must perforce adjust our daily practices." (HARVEY, 1989, p. 204)

Thus, signification is a practice of making, disseminating, and submitting subjects' bodies to specific material representations, and not just a formal play with graphic marks, words, volumes, or abstract neutral concepts. Material form-ations do not follow functions, but rather construct, produce material effects. Material practices in-form, con-form, dis-in-form as well as trans-form and re-form subjects. And vice versa: for without predicating subjects, human agents, there is no signification, thus no material forms in the making nor effects being produced either. Concrete, syntactic formations, carried out by processes and practices of signification, and the effects they produce on subjects, are always interdependent, and such a triad, as any other triad, is reversible and without privileged, fixed positions or orientations. We use signs as much as signs use us. We design representations as much as representations design us. And formations and their effects also change subsequent processes and practices.

Significação e design

RESUMO

Significação é uma prática social de construção de sentidos que implica na produção de divisões semânticas ou signos (*signum facere*), que decorrem de diferenças construídas artificialmente pelos sujeitos predicantes de cada formação cultural. Para o/a designer formular soluções relevantes de design para seu entorno social ele/ela tem que rejeitar muito do que é sabido, premissas a-priorísticas, posições fixas dicotomizadas e definições reducionistas, para que possa pensar criativamente acerca de seus problemas práticos. Soluções inovadoras não seguem a filosofia excludente do *isto* ou *aquilo*, mas adotam ao invés a inclusividade do *isto e aquilo*, o que explica a proximidade da pós-modernidade do design atual com a semiótica de Peirce, que este trabalho pretende mostrar.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Significação. Semiótica. Design. Peirce.

Singificación y Diseño

RESUMEN

El significado es una práctica social de construcción de sentido que implica la producción de las divisiones de semántica o signos (*signum facere*), que surgen de las diferencias construidas artificialmente por los predicadores de los temas de cada contexto cultural. Para el diseñador adecuar las soluciones a su medio social, el tiene que rechazar gran parte de lo que se conoce, los locales-priorísticas, fija dicotomizadas y definiciones reducionistas, para que pueda pensar creativamente sobre sus problemas concretos. Soluciones innovadoras que no siguen la filosofía de la exclusión de esto y aquello, pero abarcan la inclusión de esto y aquello, lo que explica la proximidad del diseño post-moderno en la semiótica de Peirce, que este estudio tiene como objetivo mostrar.

PALABRAS-CLAVE: Significación. Semiótica. Diseño. Peirce.

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