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## GRADUALNESS OF ICONICITY IN SEMIOTIC DISCOURSE

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**Abstract:** *The contemporary world is pregnant under the sign of the image that dominates various social practices, like advertising, propaganda and the media. The exponential growth of information involves the use of iconic encoding; when it comes to knowledge transmission this codification is successful economic storage, synthetic and readability of the data. Some perceptual grids, social and cultural, which orients the production or reproduction of iconic signs (by schematization and eliminating of non-relevant traits or identification based on some pertinent traits) were established in what was called the degree of convention or coding of iconic signs. Therefore, any iconic sign, coding effect of a perceptual experience, requires a learning process because often we see the object what we have learned to see, or what we orientate see. In this respect, the aim of the paper that we propose is to carry out an analysis on the principles that determine the birth of symbolic occurrences.*

**Keywords:** *iconic coding, perceptual experience, symbolic occurrences, semiosphere*

### 1. INTRODUCTION

The origins of "iconicity" can be identified in ancient Greek philosophy in the writings of Plato (Peters, 1993:170-172) and Aristotle (Peters, 1993:79), which highlight the concept of *eidōs*, understood as appearance, shape, type, species, idea that exists in the matter. The semiotic concept of *icon* is found but in the semiotic system proposed and developed by Ch. S. Peirce. Referring to the iconic sign, the semiotician note: "An icon is a sign which refers to the object it denotes simply by virtue of their characteristics..." (Peirce, 1990:277) and "A sign may be iconic sign [...], it can be represent covered broadly by its similarity ..." (Peirce, 1990:286).

The second trichotomy proposed that Ch. S. Peirce, who is also the best known, is based on the relationship of the sign with the object and assume to distinguish between: icon, index and symbol. In this regard, Ch. Peirce considered that everything, quality or law may be icon for something to the extent that it resembles something that, whether the latter is real or imaginary. Thus, an icon "is determined by its dynamic object due to its own internal", an index means because the sign is in a real relationship with the object, "is indeed marked by this object" and "has the quality necessarily shared some object" (Peirce, 1990:277) and a symbol is a sign that signifies just because a convention, without any similarity or physical connection to the subject designated:

he depends so either a convention, a skill or a natural disposition of the *interpretant* or either his *interpretant* field (Peirce, 1990:239).

An icon, considers Ch. Peirce, retains its signified character even in the absence of the object represented, while an index loses this character if its object is missing. Regarding symbol signifying nature, it does not depend on the object, but the *interpretant* - he does not exist as such only by virtue of being perceived by someone as having a specific meaning.

### 2. CONSTITUTION OF ICONIC SIGNS AND ICONICITY

The analysis of the icon term reveals a strict intension of the sense of this concept, which aims actual content of the concept and an extensional sense, all things, phenomena and situations are designated, that have, to some extent, iconic features. Regarding the intension meaning, the icon is understood only as an abstract construction, characterized by a number of properties without the benefit of a concrete material reality. Its function is instrumental and is to describe a certain type of relationship, namely the relationship of iconicity. Thus, the icon does not designate a class of objects with actual existence or a class of phenomena; there is no particular icon, perceptible as such or reified in some way; there is no icon or pure iconicity, but certain things or phenomena

that have, to varying degrees this property, among other features.

Extension notion of icon include reporting to analogic relationship between the signifier and the object represented. The icon is not equivalent of the image, but reporting the icon supposed to consider concepts such as image, particularly visual images. In this regard, an important role is visual communication, which is achieved by using at least two categories of signs, iconic and plastic signs, also called visual signs. The iconic sign involves producing a semiotic rupture because although the relationship between image and what it represents is performed by analogy the contact with the object is broken. Thus, the iconic report of analogy preserves some of the original features but operates a very strict selection of relevant features to rebuild them in material and with a scale that have nothing in common with the object itself. In this regard, D. Bounoux said:

Although it has a less immediate status only indies our iconic layer of communications rather easily pass borders: therefore some actual pictures (CNN) or fiction (Hollywood, Mickey Mouse) are products worldwide directly today (Bounoux, 2000:47)

or:

We mean there are thousands of things that do not exist, we can talk about the future, we can represent Licorns, we can talk about Prince Hamlet or about Elsinor court. Only in the semiosphere we can play, we can build hypotheses, fictions imagine, we can multiply alternative or virtual worlds away from the contingencies of the sole real world (Bounoux, 2000:51).

Referring to the iconicity notion, N. Goodman divides two categories of relations, namely: relations of resemblance and relations of representation and criticizes attempt to explain the relation of representation by the resemblance. His argument is that an object in the largely "resembling" it, but rarely represent himself: "likeness in any degree is not enough requirement for representation" (Goodman, 1969:4). Regarding the icon, the resemblance problem involves two types of questioning: on the one hand, the question of resemblance signifier with the object (the referent), and on the other hand, the issue of resemblance of the signifier with the interpretant (the signified). As regards the resemblance relation of the signifier with the object, it involves two apparently distinct situations, such as if a real referent or if an imaginary, abstract or general referent. Viewed in terms of visual - conventional

report the resemblance problem takes the following form: where visual signs (conventional - arbitrary) there is no resemblance, whereas, in the case of conventional signs, partly motivated, resemblance is a matter of degree.

One of the authors who believe that iconicity is only a matter of degree is Ch. Morris. In this regard, he stated:

An iconic sign is a sign similar in some respects to what it denotes. Consequently, the iconicity it is a matter of degree (Morris, 1946:117).

This rule is explained by the fact that the object represented in the image is not formed of the same material from which it is made into reality and is no represented in several sizes. The idea will be taken over by J. A. Ramirez-Rodriguez, who stating that:

It can be seen as a iconic sign that sign which appear to have similarities with what he reveals, for the best visual perceptions (Helbo, 1979:16).

In the same vein, U. Eco will examine the issue of iconic signs from the perspective of a establishing typology of signs (Eco 1982: 117). Insisting on the conventional character of iconic sign, U. Eco will motivate that it does not have the same physical object properties and it functions as a perceptual structure similar to that of this one. In this regard, the semiotician claims the proposition that communication lies not in the relationship between code and message, but in the mechanisms of perception itself. Thus, under normal perceptual codes, through selecting certain stimulus - after other stimulus being eliminated - the receiver can build a structure similar to the perceptual object.

In defining the iconic sign, U. Eco will use terms such as: resemblance, analogy, motivation, focusing on reconfiguring similarities between sign and represented object. Thus he argues that dependency sign of the object is at the root sign and the semiotic report is built by putting into play the conventional elements (Eco, 1982:188).

Trying to explain the iconicity, U. Eco brings into focus the idea of codes of recognition and stresses that these

blocks structure in terms of perception of *seme*, designating what is called micro-image or minimal iconic sign (a man, a house, a tree, etc.), after which we recognize objects perception ... (Eco, 1982:37).

This refers to the fact that into an image can't recognize than what is known through a cultural experience, because, in his view: "signs called

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iconic are culturally coded" (Eco, 1982:255). Regarding the iconic code, according to U. Eco, it is a system designed to ensure consistency between graphics (visual) and cultural perceptual units that have a coding previous of perceptual experience, the iconicity as expressed in the equation "iconic = analogic = motivated = natural" (Eco, 1982, p. 274). Thus, to represent iconic an object, says Umberto Eco, is to transcribe using graphics fireworks (or other) the cultural properties that are attributed (Eco, 1970:271).

The iconic signs appear as visual "texts" that can be "read" with the constituent units.

"That a so-called iconic sign is a text, and that proves its equivalent word is not a word, but [...] a description, a sentence, sometimes a whole speech, a reference act [...]. Outside the context the iconic units have not status and therefore do not belong to a code; out of the context «iconic signs» are not «signs»; neither coded nor resembles something that is hard to understand (Eco, 1982:281-282).

The iconic sign is a mediator sign, with dual function, to the reference to sign model and to its manufacturer. This has some specific features of the referent, but complementary, holds some special qualities of the model. The iconic signs can be of two types: figurative and non-figurative. The iconic figurative signs, called natural icon, meet to the first level of significance, is the spatial properties and send to their referent or their signifier through a direct relationship, with objective basis, the Index type, or through imitation, with varying degrees of accuracy, at this type of relationship. Getting iconic figurative signs learn from the experience of ordinary empirical or through an initiation that can reach up to study scientific disciplines. Instead, iconic non-figurative signs, called logical icon, represents non-space properties. They involve their referent or their signified in a relationship with objective basis. Getting to them also involves an initiation, namely an introduction to the process of abstraction.

The iconic signs can be *intra-cultural signs* and *extra-cultural signs*. The *intra-cultural iconic signs* refer to a precise concept, without their perception being conditioned by a special training of the receptor. For instance, picture or drawing of a certain tree send a real concept, local receiver have an experience of recognition. Regarding *extra-cultural iconic signs*, the experience of receiver in their recognition missing; therefore they require a special training of receiver to their perception. For example: an individual does not

recognize an object if not previously explained how to use this or a new iconic sign send us to an stereotypical object whose appearance concrete will have the same analog connection with the object of reality. Reporting to the iconic sign is made from different perspectives: of the report of analogy, of the mechanisms of visual perception, cultural experience, denotation and connotation. The iconic sign, like linguistic sign is full of meaning and represent the essence of a visual message that can be expressed verbally through an enunciation or a text.

**2.1 Gradualness of iconicity.** The semiotic theories developed on the icon sign reveals the gradual nature of iconicity. Thus, for C. Morris "iconicity is a matter of degree" (Morris 1964:191); U. Eco speaks of establishing typologies of iconic signs; Ch. Metz speaks about specific con-sensuality of a culture regarding the issue of iconicity and J. Aumont about gradualness of analogy. In addition, in 1972, A. Moles achieve an attempt to use a scale of 12 levels iconicity, which in informational theory of a schema try to unify the concept of image.

Gradualness of iconicity is constituted in a report with the referent. Thus it is easy to understand, we can say that it can be understand even intuitive, with accessible facts as a starting point of common experience. It involves some degree of similarity (resemblance) of concrete images with referent and on the other hand, the degree of similarity (resemblance) of concrete images with the signified. That means if two objects have a certain physical reality, its comparing the similarity between the image and its referent, which is performed without difficulty. Instead, two things of different nature, such as a physical object (image) and certain mental content (signified), the comparison in terms of likeness is more complex. Arguments supporting this possibility concern: compare existing information in the image to that resuscitated after evocation signified (hence that it is no longer compared different nature, but similar nature) and referent, which can be of a general, abstract or imagined character, it can be described as real characters, imaginary leaving only their combination. In that case, each of these properties can be investigated to determine whether and to what extent is represented or reproduced in image.

Referring to the issue of gradualness of iconicity, Christian Metz will distinguish between quantitative and qualitative gradualness of iconicity. Qualitative gradualness is explained by

him as closely related to cultural determinations specific of an area or community, so that it might be called a con-sensuality specific of one culture:

Visual analogy - and this time the currently accepted variations admit that we might call quantitative. This is, for example, the notion of different <degrees of iconicity> as an author like A. A. Moles; is the problem of a greater or less schematic, of a <styling> it various levels. Visual analogy admit / and/ qualitative variations. <Resemblance> is valued differently depending on culture. In the same culture, there are several lines of resemblance: always in a certain respect they resembled two objects. Thus, the resemblance (*la ressemblance*) is itself a system, more precisely, a set of systems (Metz, 1970:8).

The same idea of gradualness of iconicity is found at the J. Aumont, expressed by the distinction between realism and analogy, that distinction is based on the concept of information. Thus, for J. Aumont the realistic image is not necessarily which produces the illusion of reality, and not that produces an analogy, but one that offers maximum of information about reality. Consequently, the analogy aims appearance, visible reality and realism aims quantity and quality of information inserted by image and through image. In this regard, J. Aumont said:

realistic image is one that gives maximum of pertinent information, namely information easily accessible (Aumont, 1990:160-161).

Thus we speak of criteria for determining what is pertinent in relation to a topic about selecting the appropriate information. In addition, the crop of reality is conditioned by a number of cultural, consensual and conventional factors; image realism will therefore have to comply with a conditional spatial and temporal representation.

Another theory of gradualness of iconicity belongs to U. Volli. According to his opinion, the probability is the factor that intervening in the gradualness of iconicity. Thus, recognition is expressed as a probability determined statistically (a line has *almost* the same length as the term of comparison, an area that has *almost* the same color, etc.) and does not form a clear decision expressed as a categorical affirmation or negation, like "yes" or "no". The analysis of made by U. Volli, does not require that an ideal prototype of each working that to represent the "truth", but it is a "set" of criteria socially accepted as defining the structure of a particular thing may probabilistic factor real-time express the uncertainty of the recognition process.

**2.2 Articulation of visual codes and the symbolic occurrences.** In his work *Sign and interpretation. An introduction to the postmodern semiology and hermeneutics*, Aurel Codoban spoke about the existence of two axioms that make sign an object sui generis, namely: *pan-semiology* and *poly-semiology* (Codoban, 2001:14-15). Regarding *pan-semiology*, this axiom states that it is sign and that any sign has a meaning, or at least may have a meaning. *Poly-semiology* states that any sign (or object) can have several meanings, uniqueness of existence not giving uniqueness of the meaning. Both axioms constitute as the principles that determine the birth of symbolic occurrences. For in terms of Ferdinand de Saussure "semiotic consciousness" is the one that accompanies the birth of any culture, the signifying being a condition of possibility (output) of the communication, the default code (what we call potential significance) and updated and enriched by context (namely in terms of semiotic called the current significance). The deciphering of the meaning of events and actions that happen around us represents, in the view of Roland Barthes, important *reading* in our lives, they involve social, moral or ideological values and the reflection on them can be called semiology (Barthes, 1985:227). The action to decipher of the meaning of natural world is accompanied by a world of signs and, extrapolating, by a world of culture. It is constituted as a *semiosphere* and the man as "symbolic animal" presents to read it, decipher it, use it or process it. All these actions are actually likes that every human individual makes on what is constituted as significance and which then uses in the communication process.

The study of iconicity and visual codes imply the visual images and visual communication. Visual communication is performed using at least two categories of signs, *iconic* and *plastics*. In front of a visual phenomenon are two possible attitudes: either a perception of the plastic phenomenon or the corruption inform of the iconic sign (it can be said either that "it is blue" or that "it represent blue"). Even if the two signs can appear stacked in their physical manifestation, it is theoretically distinct structures.

In 1969, N. Goodman suggested instead binary relationship iconic - plastic, a triadic relationship, consisting of *verbal language*, *image* and *scoring*, each operating with a different type of reference. For the purpose of N. Goodman, *reference* was a very general term, more guidance, which designated any option *to stay in someone place*.

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Denotation, considered a species of reference, made up its core and was based on representation and expression. The difference between the verbal language and symbolic notation was seen in how their particular operation. Thus the symbols of verbal system can be ambiguous, that, although they are syntactically different, not necessarily appear so in a semantic: what a signifier denotes what may include other signifiers denotes.

Denoting through image (namely representation), not reduced, in terms of N. Goodman at the idea of resemblance. N. Goodman rejected the resemblance as a basis for networking and has in this respect three reasons, namely: the resemblance depends largely on the traditions and culture; the resemblance is irrelevant because anything can look like anything; similar things are not represent each other. Differentiating element that was given signifiers (symbolic occurrences, in N. Goodman's terminology) has a continuous nature, which makes them partially overlap, both in syntactic and semantic.

The real cognitive process involves the existence of two situations: when there is a hypothetical denoted or when there is a confirmed denoted. Since etymologically *icon* sends to the visual field, although within its scope is much broader (there is and other iconic relationship, except those that are manifested in the dimensional visual images, namely we can talk about sound, touch, smell, or even in the plane of abstraction iconicity), reporting to understanding of the hypothetical or confirmed denotation we will achieve through the idea of *image*. Thus, as long as we do not know with certainty what appears in an image, it is the *hypothetical denotation*, situation in which we assume that it is one thing or another, seeking details that we unquestionably confirm the advanced hypothesis. In this case, the strategy will first try cognitive followed, to establish what information safe provide the image in question, then, on this basis, to achieve the necessary inferences to identify the references. In the second situation, when we know with certainty what appears in an image, we're a *confirmed denotation*. Thus by comparing the image of the thing with the thing itself, there is no question of the resemblance than metaphorically, but is seeking answers to questions about the contents of the image and its relevance. Understanding the denotation is actually the identification of signifier-type that to determine the defining parameters where must register the interpretations to be recognized as belonging to the class of the signified and therefore can send to it.

In this sense, the occurrences of a signifier-type must meet the relevant properties that stated by the signifier-type, even if in addition they involve individual characteristics, irrelevant to the constituent interpretations.

### 3. CONCLUSIONS

The deciphering of the reality also requires a reference to the iconic sign. The icon does not designate a class of objects with actual existence or a class of phenomena, but certain things or phenomena that have, to varying degrees this property, among other features. The reporting of the icon supposed to consider concepts such as image, particularly visual images, visual communication, but the icon is not equivalent of the image.

The semiotic theories developed on the icon sign reveals the gradual nature of iconicity. Gradualness of iconicity is constituted in a report with the referent. That can be understood even intuitive, with accessible facts as a starting point of common experience.

Every action to decipher the meaning of the natural world requires a reference to the world of the signs and hence to the culture. Thus, the world is constituted as a semiosphere where the individual as a "symbolic animal" presents to read it, decode it, use it or process it. All these actions are actually likes that every human individual makes on what is considered as the significance and which then uses the communication process.

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