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PEIRCEAN METAPHOR REEXAMINED: CREATION, FUNCTION AND INTERPRETATION¹

ABSTRACT

The Peircean iconic metaphor takes the concept of metaphor beyond linguistic and literary metaphors and does not even limit it to the “conventional metaphor” of Lakoff and Johnson’s cognitive theory. Given Peirce’s short and somewhat ambiguous definition of the metaphorical icon, a closer study of this category of icons is necessary for a better understanding of a concept that surpasses in many respects the earlier definitions of metaphor. It is also necessary to observe metaphors from the perspective of their creator: a perspective that is not usually adopted in other theories of metaphor, since much of the debates consider only the structure of the metaphor and its function with a focus on its interpretation, and do not discuss how the creator of the metaphor reaches or creates a metaphor. The present article aims at filling the mentioned blanks.

Keywords: Charles Sanders Peirce, iconic metaphor, final interpretation, iconicity.

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1. PEIRCEAN METAPHOR AND OTHER ICONS

To better understand the structure and function of the metaphorical icon, we will contrast it with other types of Peircean icons, namely images and diagrams. The contrast arises, above all, in the type of relation established in each case between the iconic representamen and the object (reference), and in the aspect in which each icon represents its object (similarity).

1.1. Iconic metaphor and reference

Reference, as the thing to which a sign refers, may be an insignificant dimension in some signs, but there is no sign wholly lacking one of the three functions of iconicity, indexicality or symbolicity. So even a sign identified as an icon—as in the case of Peirce’s metaphor—has a reference, as long as it is intelligible, that is, as long as it functions semiotically as something interpretable. Peirce says metaphors “represent the representative character of an object representing a parallelism in something else” (Peirce Edition Project (ed.), 1998, 277). Now, if in the case of images and diagrams, we have a hint as to their referent, Peirce does not make anything clear about the referent of the metaphor, that is, about the aspect in which a metaphor represents its object.

If in iconic images we speak of a representation of simple qualities and in diagrams, of relations between elements, in metaphors we only know that the representation is based on a parallelism in “something else;” that is to say, a metaphorical sign is a representation of its object because they are similar in “something else.” As Carl R. Hausman (1989, 396) puts it, it seems as if the referent of the metaphor was something outside the sign itself, or its referent was “non-self-referential.”

Now this “something else,” the referent outside the metaphorical sign, can be nothing but a creation of the metaphor itself. In a metaphor, Douglas Anderson explains, there seem to be four things similar in one respect:

“When Peirce argues for the dyadicness of analogy, he does so, on the ground that two things are alike in one respect. In a metaphor, however, there seem to be four things: the two *relata* and the different quality sets of each. When Peirce holds metaphors to be thirds, he suggests the presence of a third thing which ties together the quality sets of the *relata*. But he does not tell us what this third thing is” (Anderson, 1984, 455).

This “third thing” that unites or relates the qualities of the *relata* (objects between which this relation has been established) is what we consider the referent of the metaphor. But where does it come from? It seems that a metaphor, as long as it is a metaphorical hypoicon or a creative and novel metaphor, creates an analogy or similarity between the *relata*. That is to say, it

chooses a convenient aspect from each *relata* and creates a similarity between them—although at first sight they have nothing in common—and unites them. In Anderson’s words “the metaphor points us to the referent which it creates. From this referent, we can select certain qualities which appear fitting. We select certain parts of the open referent and conventionalize them” (1984, 464). So, the metaphorical icon creates its own referent, looking for it in the dynamic objects and reveals it abductively and in a new and ingenious way. That is, the metaphor chooses from the qualities of both dynamical objects the ones it considers appropriate for the creation of an analogy or a similarity, so that each one can be a representation of the other, or an icon of the other.

1.2. The question of similarity

When we speak of icons, similarity can be understood as the similarity between the sign and the represented object: a sign becomes an icon of an object when it resembles it in a certain aspect, for example, if it’s similar to it because they share a quality (images), because they are alike as certain relations between the elements of the sign resemble/are analogous to the relations established between certain elements of the object (diagrams), or because it resembles its object in parallelism in “something else” (metaphors).

Peirce speaks of “parallelism” only in the case of the metaphorical icon. This can make us think that the parallelism between the metaphorical icon and its object is the key to their similarity. We suggest that the similarity between the object and the metaphor is created in the process of metaphorization itself, as it happens with the referent. Now, the closest thing to an object for a metaphor seems to be an experience; so when we speak of parallelism, we are referring not to an initial resemblance between the metaphor and its object, but to a similarity between the function or effect of the metaphor and the represented object.

In other words, metaphors are parallel to an experience, because they are able to evoke that experience, to represent it vividly, to make us re-live that experience. When a piece of music, for example, becomes the metaphor of an emotion or a memory, or in general terms, of an experience, is not the sequence of notes and silences that “resembles” or is “analogous” to that experience: it is the experience of hearing that piece that is parallel to another experience, and only a metaphor is powerful enough to make both experiences one. This very function of metaphor differentiates it from images and diagrams: while the latter are direct representations of one type of similarity, metaphors convert that similarity into a parallelism based on an experience that does not depend on similarity in order to exist. In fact, met-

aphors are capable of arising from dissimilarity, or from the negation of similarity.²

There is still another point that differentiates metaphors from images and diagrams. To underline it, we will consider the cognitive theory of linguistic metaphor since it resembles the Peircean concept of metaphor in some respects and is explicit enough to help us understand this difference better. One of the facts on which linguists agree is that a metaphor's function is not only to take certain elements from a domain (source) to another domain (target)—as explained by the conceptual metaphor theory, for instance—and for a metaphor to be novel a type of fusion between elements must occur and something new must be created in a “blended space” as the conceptual integration theory puts it: “The blended space does not only contain a selection of properties drawn from the two input domains: it also contains new conceptual material that arises from an elaboration of the conceptual blend on the basis of encyclopaedic knowledge” (Croft, Cruse, 2004, 208).

Lakoff and Johnson argued that the target domain lacks certain cognitive image-schema structures, which are added to the source domain through metaphorization; this implies some interaction, although minimal, between the structures of the two domains. (cf. Croft, Cruse, 2004, 204). Other theories of metaphor, such as that of Jackendoff and Aaron, propose an even more interactive relationship between the structures of the two domains, something like a “fusion” or “over-imposition” of the two structures, like Max Black's concept of “interaction” and Paul Ricoeur's “reverberation.” What comes in the case of these arguments is that everyone asserts that metaphors create something new, based on a prior “encyclopaedic” knowledge, and do much more than just transporting elements from one domain to another: “... the source domain concepts are transformed as well in being metaphorically applied to the target domain; the metaphor brings much more than extra image-schematic structure to the target domain” (Croft, Cruse, 2004, 204).

The Peircean metaphor, likewise, presents this creative character; we have already seen how it is able to create its own referent, and thus, in the same way, it creates the similarity on the basis of which it represents its object. Now, the question is whether the same thing happens in images and diagrams; we will try to answer this question by some examples. One of the most visible contexts in which iconic images are created, shared and interpreted is logo design. From a cognitive perspective, a change of domain also

² For example, the poetic metaphor: “The horseman got closer, playing the **drums of the plains**” (Federico García Lorca, ROMANCE DE LA LUNA, LUNA (Romancero Gitano)), brings two completely dissimilar concepts together: “plains” and “drums;” yet it creates a similarity between them through a sonorous experience that can only be understood in the context of the poem as a whole and taking the cultural background of the poet into consideration.

occurs, when the element A (the letter S for example) is taken to the domain B (the image of a snake), and we begin to see the serpent of the logo as the letter S, in a natural way. So, a series of fusion of elements are made and, apparently, something new is created; however, the similarity between the icon and its object (the S of the logo and the serpent), is a pre-existing resemblance that is being rediscovered. Therefore, the referent of the iconic image is not something created outside the sign; it is pre-existent, even if it has been chosen creatively.³

Something similar happens with diagrams. Since a diagram represents analogies at the level of relations between the elements of the object it represents, this representation must be faithful to the predetermined structures of the object, therefore, it has a quite limited margin for any innovation. Even so, different types of diagrams of same objects, various types of maps of a same place for example, choose different elements of their objects and different relations between them for the sake of representation: a geographical map does not represent a city like a political map, etc. Thus, the question of choosing certain qualities of the object for representation is also a fact in diagrams. However, nothing new is created and the referent of the diagram is not outside the sign. In other words, a diagram is an iconic representation of a relationship between elements, regardless of whether it represents those relations referred to an existing object or simply a mental concept as possible object (as is the case of perfect geometric figures) and fulfils its role of representation based on an existing analogy, already present in the object and, therefore, in the sign.

The difference in this respect between the metaphorical icon and the two other types of icons is thus evident: although the discovery or selection of representative similarity may be abductive and creative in all three types of icons, only in metaphors this similarity is to be understood as parallelism. That is to say, in the case of metaphors, the question is not making a creative choice but rather, converting representation into re-representation, a non-existent parallelism created by and for metaphor.

1.3. Creation and interpretation of an iconic metaphor

Metaphors depend on a creator or a creative mind more than images and diagrams do. The abductive choice of the qualities of dynamical objects or the creation of the referent is something that occurs in the creator's mind. The creation of iconic metaphors, in fact, lies in the infinite semiosis, in the

³ Of course, we cannot ignore the existence of clever and humorous effects in logos, which clearly do not pre-exist in forms. The examples proposed in *Multimodal Metaphor* (Forceville, Urios-Aparisi (eds.), 2009), for instance, account for a creative process that is clearly iconic but not the level of image icons: it is clearly metaphorical; it departs from dissimilarity and creates the needed resemblance through an experience.

idea that one sign is always the sign of another sign. For example, in order to be represented, a very intense emotional experience needs to resort to other representations combined in a certain way and able to create a metaphor of that emotion. Thus, it is the creator of the metaphor who discovers this parallelism “in something else” and reveals it to the interpreter by means of a metaphor; this happens, of course, only if there is an interpreter for the metaphor, since the creator is sometimes the only interpreter.

Therefore, different metaphors may be created by different creators from certain same dynamical objects: each creative mind can experience different metaphoric abductions on certain dynamical objects and thus create different immediate objects and Interpretants. Hausman speaks of this subject affirming the degree of “relativism” of iconic metaphors:

“Metaphors are creative of their referents by virtue of their immediate objects and apt, adequate, relevant to the world, by virtue of their dynamical objects. And being apt is tested by the constraints of dynamical objects. Of course, the proposal that such tests are all we can expect is open to the change of relativism- each metaphor creator and each interpreter may encounter constraints not recognized by others. However, at this pinot the test of convergence, or a community of agreement, in a limited form, can be called back” (Hausman, 1989, 404).

So, the possibility of different interpretations for the same metaphor is undeniable. However, when a metaphor is interpreted in the same way by different interpreters and is reused in the same context to mean something unique, it becomes “common” or is symbolized, in terms of Peirce. From then on, it is no longer a living metaphor, but rather a symbol: a metaphorical symbol; good examples of this case are linguistic metaphors such as “the foot of the bed” or music pieces so strongly related to certain situations that are commonly recognized as their symbols. On the other hand, although the creation of metaphors is flexible and leaves the possibility of obtaining a somewhat flexible interpretation open, we must not forget the role metaphors play in epistemology and their contribution to the Truth. In a book on literary metaphor, Tudor Vianu states something crucial to our argument: “Our spirit captures, by poetic metaphors, real similarities between things, similarities that are not presupposed. The spiritual role of a metaphor is precisely that of expressing the similarities between things that cannot be object of theoretical generalization” (Vianu, 1967, 94; mine translation).

Although there may indeed be metaphors that have no contribution to the Truth (as they are merely personal and lack the objective of being communicated or simply because of their low semiotic value), many other iconic metaphors, especially the linguistic ones, do play an important semiotic role and contribute to epistemological knowledge, since creative metaphors rep-

resent new aspects of existing realities or even reveal new ones. So when poets, for example, create novel poetic metaphors, they guide us into getting closer to the cognition of the metaphorized elements. In other words, metaphors become a means for the search of Truth. If Truth is something as inaccessible as Peirce's Final Interpretation of signs, each sign is a small torch that reveals part of the Truth. Speaking of the final interpretant, Peirce says "it is that which *would* finally be decided to be the true interpretation if consideration of the matter were carried so far that an ultimate opinion were reached" (Peirce, 1978–1980c, 139). For Peirce, the Final Interpretation could be reached if one uses the help of a community—to some extent an ideal one—to investigate it:

"... the very origin of the conception of reality shows that this conception essentially implies the notion of a COMMUNITY, without definite limits, and capable of an indefinite increase of knowledge. [...] Now a proposition whose falsity can never be discovered, and the error of which therefore is absolutely incognizable, contains, upon our principle, absolutely no error. Consequently, that which is thought in these cognitions is the real, as it really is. There is nothing, then, to prevent our knowing outward things as they really are, and it is most likely that we do thus know them in numberless cases, although we can never be absolutely certain of doing so in any special case" (Peirce Edition Project (ed.), 1992, 52).

So, for Peirce, each sign shows us a part of reality and epistemological knowledge of truth could be achieved, albeit under very ideal conditions, if the small truths acquired through each sign are brought together. Now iconic metaphor has the same function, but it continues to outstrip other signs since it is capable of revealing new epistemological aspects and is not limited to representing what has previously been shown by other types of signs.

2. METAPHORS AND PEIRCEAN SIGN ELEMENTS

While studying the iconic metaphor's function, analysing its components as a Peircean sign is also illustrative. The triadic relationship in a Peircean sign is established between the Object, the representamen the interpretant, and on the other hand, as Umberto Eco explains, each sign or representation is simultaneously related to three instances: its Interpreter, its Ground and its Object (Eco, 1997, 113). A metaphor, as a Peircean sign, consists of the same elements, but how exactly do they relate and function in such an ambiguous sign? Here are some ideas we suggest.

2.1. The Representamen

Although Peirce was influenced more by Aristotle, many of the concepts in his categories of signs can be seen from a rather Platonic point of view: if for Plato Reality was only a shadow of an inaccessible Truth, Peirce also insists on the existence of something beyond the signs and their components that could not be discovered by ordinary scientific studies, as is the case of genuine signs, dynamical objects or final interpretants. The case of representation in a sign is not outside this framework: the representamen is the shadow, the reflection of the object. That is, what we can semiotically work with is the representamen not the object itself. The representamen of an iconic metaphor is, as in other signs, “something which stands to somebody for something in some respect or capacity” (Peirce, 2011, 100).

Peirce says that a representamen addresses somebody and creates in the mind of that person “an equivalent sign or perhaps a more developed sign” (Peirce, 1978–1980(a), 228). which Peirce calls the interpretant of the sign. In the case of the metaphorical icon, it might be more appropriate to assert that the metaphorical representamen is a more developed sign than its object, since it goes beyond the object, and is not limited to the pre-existing qualities and predetermined structures of its object, but rather creates and “adds” something to the object (insofar as it refers to the immediate object) and thus transcends its limits. As Garcia Bacca says, paraphrasing Martin Heidegger:

“Metaphor and metaphysics have, in their background and roots, a single function: to put things beyond (*meta*), plus ultra, their incardination, establishment, fixation in singulars, in things and cases; moving them gracefully (*fora*) from one thing to another, without letting them lie on any of them or get attached to them” (cf. Heidegger, 1989, 52).

Other considerable issue is that the representamen of an iconic metaphor does not always have materiality. Peirce says that:

“The representative function of a sign lies neither in its material quality nor in its pure demonstrative application; because it is something which the sign is, not in itself or in a real relation to its object, but which it is *to a thought*, while both of the characters just defined belong to the sign independently of its addressing any thought” (Peirce, 1978–1980b, 287).

If we look for Peircean metaphors in language, it is always easier to find them already materialized in form of words, letters or punctuation signs. But there are also metaphorical voids, e.g., when the blank space after a word or phrase becomes the metaphor of a sensation; The same happens in plastic arts such as painting where void, the lack of visual elements, metaphorizes a wide range of sensations such as pause, awaiting, melancholy,

etc. However most iconic metaphors are more ethereal and appear as sounds, smells or firstness related feelings. Here the representamen of the metaphor is as ethereal as the icon itself.

When a certain smell, for example, that of a particular flower, say a daisy, reminds a person of a certain stage or moment of their life in an iconic way, that is, immediately and directly, we are faced with a metaphorical experience lived by this person: there is a parallelism, a point of similarity, that this person discovers or rather creates between the smell and the memory; this smell is the representamen of the metaphor since it represents the smell of a daisy previously known by the person who has this metaphorical experience. If we assume that all daisies of the same species smell the same, then the smell that has become the metaphorical representamen is only the memory, the shadow, of a certain daisy (the metaphorical sign) with the same smell at a moment in the interpreter's past. Thus, the smell of the flower is no longer a smell, but the memory of a smell: it is not the flower that gives off that smell, but a certain moment in the life of the person who experiences that metaphoricity. In this way, the representamen of the metaphor can also be the memory of that moment: a memory with the smell of daisies that when evoked in the interpreter's mind, fills it with that smell and if there is, by chance, a bouquet of daisies in the vase, it becomes the object of a metaphorical creation.

It is evident that the perception reached through our five senses is always more tangible and accessible than memories stored in the conscious or subconscious mind; that is why we can find more metaphors in which a sensory perception is the representamen of the metaphorical sign, but we must not dismiss memories as metaphorical signs.

2.2. The ground

Peirce does not accept intuitive knowledge without inference and proposes the abductive discovery as a direct and immediate form of knowing, since in abduction there is some interference of previous knowledge. The prior knowledge, on the one hand, depends on the person who experiences abduction: on their past experiences, their ambient, their thoughts, etc., and on the other hand emerges from a chain of thoughts or infinite signs that go back to the beginning of the history of humanity, a chain all humans are inevitably part of.

Peirce also speaks of the concept of ground in some occasions—although this concept dissolved in that of the interpretant later: “[the representamen] stands for that object, not in all respects, but in reference to a sort of idea which I have sometimes called the ground of the representamen” (Peirce, 1978–1980a, 228). So, the ground of the sign is a “sort of idea,” with reference to which the representamen represents its object in a certain respect.

That is to say, that idea interferes in the function of the representamen, influencing the formation of the immediate object: the ground is a type of interference that affects the representative function of the sign.

Now, metaphors are creative and abductive signs par excellence, to the point that they themselves are their own creator: we have already observed how they create their referent and their object. As a Peircean sign, a metaphor cannot be created intuitively and acquires the existence or the interference of some previous knowledge; this is where the role of a ground as an inference affecting a metaphor's abductive discovery and its creative formation must be considered. On the one hand, in regard to dynamical objects, the footprint of a ground and its intervention in the metaphor are minimal, since iconic metaphor's creativeness and immediacy distance it from the ground. That is, the sort of idea that determines the abductive creation of immediate objects is innovative although it is rooted in past semiosis. But on the other hand, the role of the ground is crucial as far as the novelty of the metaphor is concerned. The point is that the creator of the metaphor unites and relates two things, based on qualities or aspects of those things that it discovers abductively; as Anderson also stated, "the ground of a metaphor is an "isosensism" between the metaphor and its icon which is created by its author" (Anderson, 1984, 459). In other words, the creator discovers new qualities in certain objects, or discovers new relationships or links between certain aspects or qualities of these objects. Now, the value of a metaphor lies in its originality, novelty, or as Aristotle would say, in its being "alive". The truth is that the creativeness and the novelty of a metaphor, as a pure icon or as a possible dimension of all signs, depends very much on its creator.

While speaking of the role of a metaphor's creator, the notion of ground takes on greater importance: the ground of the metaphorical icon is the mental ground of the creator, that is, his past experiences in any aspect (material, spiritual, sentimental, educational, cultural, etc.). That's why in language, for instance, different authors create different metaphors from the same words: because they are different people that go through different semiotic processes and have different mental concepts, and each one seeks the truth with the lamp of his own metaphor. When creating a metaphor, in the abduction of that resemblance that unites the two *relata* under a metaphor which dreams of discovering the truth, each creator has different metaphorical experiences and captures the similarity in a very particular way. If all creators saw the same similarities and their semiotic action towards the objects was alike, metaphors would never be born alive and we would be faced with rather worn, symbolized, and even lexicalized metaphors that had lost their value as an iconic metaphor.

Likewise, what causes creative metaphoric experiences to be personal in any field other than language is the ground of the metaphorical sign. Of

course, this does not mean that a metaphorical experience cannot be shared or that in some cases two different people cannot have similar metaphorical experiences, and moreover we must take into account the objectivity and veracity of metaphors, once created, although their formation and creation are somewhat subjective. What we try to emphasize here is the relation between the creative aspect of the metaphor and the experience of the creator, and thus the importance of the ground in iconic metaphors.

2.3. The Object

C. Hausman, in *Metaphorical Reference and Peirce's Dynamical Object*, dedicated several pages to explaining the dynamical object of metaphors. A metaphor, says Anderson, is not only intelligible and interpretable if it refers to a concept or an object that precedes it: "creative metaphors cannot be intelligible exclusively in terms of antecedent meanings and in terms of references to antecedent objects. Their meanings are peculiarly related internally to the expression that presents them, since the intelligibility of the creative metaphor is unique" (Hausman, 1989, 395). Thus, a metaphor is already interpretable when presented in the form of a metaphorical icon, regardless of the existence of an object to which it refers. Moreover, as we have previously observed while dealing with metaphorical reference, metaphors create their own referent. Hausman relies on this fact to argue that the only object a creative metaphor can have is the immediate object:

"Thus, in case of metaphors, at least when metaphor is aesthetic, the issue concerns whether there is a dynamical object controlling the immediate object [...] Yet if the significance of artistic metaphor is immanent, and if the referents of creative metaphor are created, then We might conclude that the Peirce object is only the immediate object" (Hausman, 1989, 395).

On the other hand, although it is true that the most tangible object in a metaphor is the immediate object, we cannot deny, and Hausman also recognizes it, the existence of dynamical objects. If a metaphor is to create a similarity, a parallelism between two things and thus bring them into contact and unite them under the metaphorical icon, that similarity is perceived through the deep, though spontaneous, observation of these two things in question. In other words, it is as if each metaphor had two dynamical objects as its raw material and creatively and abductively chose an aspect from each dynamical object and created new immediate objects. Thus, the objects of a metaphorical icon are abductive immediate objects that emerge from their respective existing dynamical objects.

However, it is also true that the implication of a metaphor with its dynamical object (which is the sum of two dynamical objects) is minimal. The creativeness of metaphors and their abductive way of functioning distance

them from their dynamical objects. The immediate objects created and united in the metaphor do not closely resemble their dynamical objects and this makes the trace of dynamical objects less visible. For example, in the literary metaphor “teeth are pearls”, both “tooth” and “pearl” as immediate objects gathered in the metaphor move away from their literal sense, and therefore, as linguistic signs, from their dynamical objects. Thus, the metaphor discovers from each of the words “pearl” and “tooth” new aspects that are juxtaposed in the metaphorical sense, in relation to a parallelism. Thus, when we speak of the object of a metaphor, we refer to its immediate object (the sum of immediate objects) created from a dynamical object. Even so, if we bear in mind metaphor’s contribution to final interpretation, we can say that at the same time metaphors move away from the dynamical objects (as they distance themselves from what is already known about the dynamical objects) they approach them from a new point of view.

Thus, in our earlier example, “teeth” and “pearls” are not metaphorized only through their similarity in form, texture or color, but because they feel parallel in experience: teeth are hidden in the moist mouth as pearls are hidden in shells; that gives mouth and teeth a marine aspect, so we discover something new about them as dynamical objects. Moreover, the experience of a kiss may unite both concepts, too: the same way we submerge in sea in search of pearls, when kissing we submerge in a mouth and the teeth are found.

To better understand this concept, we can turn to the words of A. Machado on poetic creation. Machado explains that a poet, as a creator, needs material to elaborate his work, and this material consists of words, just as the sculptor works with marble or bronze. Thus, the poet has to see in the words “what has not yet received a form, what can be a mere support of an ideal world: not elaborated matter, in short” (Machado, 1997, 1315; author’s translation). That is to say, that “while in plastic arts the artist starts with overcoming the resistance of inert matter, the poet struggles with another sort of resistance: the one offered by spiritual products: words which constitute his material” (1316). Now, the struggle of the poet with the words consists in transforming them into something new, away from their conventional meaning, since “words, unlike stones, woods or metals are already, in themselves, human significations to which the poet gives, necessarily, another meaning” (Machado, 1997, 1315). Thus, in poetic expression, words, as signs, move away from their common meaning, i.e., they move away from the dynamical object they usually represent through a given immediate object. In this way, a poem gives rise to new signs created from existing signs that represent new immediate objects, abstracted from the dynamical objects. In fact, as Machado says, “if a word is a product of objectivity, conventional between subjects, a common currency for everybody’s use, it will be necessary to erase the value it has in human consciousness, its lexical mean-

ing, if it is meant to express the deep monologue” (Machado, 1997, 1361). Now, an iconic poetic metaphor follows a similar procedure. When a poet’s intention is to penetrate the enigmas, to reach the truth, he erases, on the one hand, the conventionality of words and distances them through metaphorical expression from what they usually mean or represent; but, on the other hand, he creates in them new meanings, new realities that contribute to the discovery of the Truth of words and things, which would mean, though paradoxically, an approach to dynamical objects by moving away from them.

2.4. The interpretant

We can say that the interpretant of a sign is semiotically its most creative element. In symbols and indexes and even in icons, although in a lower degree, the object and the ground are somehow predetermined or predefined and the semiotic process of sign interpretation focuses on the interpretant. Peirce explained that:

“The sign creates something in the mind of the interpreter, which something, in that it has been so created by the sign, has been, in a mediate and relative way, also created by the object of the sign, although the object is essentially other than the sign. And this creature of sign is called the interpretant” (Peirce, 1978–1980c, 136).

In other words, it is as if each component of the sign were a piece of a puzzle: already existing pieces that come together and manage to signify by means of the interpretant; the function of the interpretant is, on the one hand, to interpret the immediate object in relation to the ground, and on the other hand, to create a coherence between the sign and its elements, to create a new sign, as Peirce would say, and to provide interpretability to the sign as a whole. The case of metaphorical icon is somewhat different, in the sense that all its components enjoy a high degree of creativity, as we have been able to observe so far. If metaphor is able to create its own referent and its immediate object, it would not be at all strange if it were also the creator of its interpretant; in fact, every interpretant is “put” by the sign, but only that of icons is created, in the sense that we are invited to the spectacle of its iconic character. The interpretant of all metaphor is “spectacular,” that is to say, we must live it, participate in the feast it invites us to.

Now if the immediate object created by a metaphor moves away from its dynamical object and the similarity between the two objects is created by the metaphor itself, how does an iconic metaphor really contribute to epistemological knowledge or to the Peircean final interpretation? A metaphor’s interpretant is responsible for creating meaning, an interpretation, for the metaphor but does not guarantee that interpretation to be “truthful.” Curi-

ously, the truth of a metaphor is also a truth created by itself: a dream of a true reality. However, this created truth has the goal of approaching the final interpretation of the object of which it is a metaphor. The search for truth is one of the most prominent principles that motivate the creation of a novel, vivid metaphor and thus, the interpretant created in the mind of the creator contains part of that truth. And all this happens regardless of whether or not the future interpreters of the metaphor give it a complete interpretation. In other words, the interpretation associated to a metaphor by an interpretant, which is created in the mind of the interpreter of that metaphor, also depends on factors that are outside the metaphor, as Peirce says: “all that part of the understanding of the sign which the interpreting mind has needed collateral observation for is outside the interpretant; I mean previous acquaintance with what the sign denotes” (Peirce, 1978–1980c, 136).

Thus, the ambiguity of the interpretant of a metaphor, created by the interpreter’s mind, does not lie in its distance from the dynamical object: unlike symbols, indexes, images and diagrams, the interpretation of a metaphor depends, in addition to the interpretant created in the mind of the creator, on the infinite interpretants that have to be created in the minds of the possible interpreters of the metaphor. However, this relativism of interpretation also has its limit: the interpretant created in the mind of the creator, is the one *he* proposes; but there may be more or less sagacious interpreters, whose interpretation of the metaphor, i.e., the interpretant the metaphor creates in their mind, can more or less coincide with the interpreter of the creator of the metaphor. If a metaphor comes to be understood in the same way by every interpreter, it is because it has lost its quality as a novel and live metaphor: we would be dealing with a symbolized metaphor. Even so, we do not deny the remote possibility that the interpreter of the author of the metaphor and that of its interpreter coincide; this could happen due to an extraordinary closeness of their grounds.

3. METAPHOR, THE “SENTICON”

Speaking of self-referent or self-signifying symbols, Peirce describes the feeling of *déjà vu*: we have an autonomous and independent feeling that at the same time seems to resemble some previous sensation. In Anderson’s words, “a feeling arises which feels appropriate but has no object to which it is appropriate. Thus, it is self-representing: it signifies its own created icon and refers, if at all, to its own created referent” (Anderson, 1984, 459).

Now, the same can be said about iconic metaphor since it is an icon that signifies itself and represents itself. The creator of the metaphor disposes of an emotion, or feeling, arising at the moment of creation, to give life to the

metaphor; the similarity that relates the two immediate objects is an emotion of the author; it is his abductive perception of certain qualities in each dynamical object that gives birth to immediate objects, related by this feeling and metaphorically self-representative. This functionality of metaphors turns them into the most complex icon of all, the one that deals mostly with “emotions”. Metaphors are born from feelings and sensations (both novel ones and those rooted in the past) and awaken feelings and emotions. Thus, however diverse and remote metaphorical experiences may be, they relate the creator of the metaphor and the mind that re-lives or re-experiences it, i.e. the interpreter, through emotions and sensations they create, awaken or rediscover.

4. SHARED METAPHOR

Derrida refers to the absence or the withdrawal of metaphors:

“If metaphor overlooks or dispenses with everything that does not happen without it, it is perhaps because in an unusual sense it overlooks itself, because it no longer has a name, a proper or literal meaning; this will begin to make the double figure of my title legible: in its withdrawal (*retrait*), or better say retreats, a metaphor, perhaps, withdraws itself, withdraws itself from the world scene, and does that at the time of its most invasive extension, at the moment when it exceeds all limits” (Derrida, 1989, 37; author’s translation).

If it is somewhat contradictory to “overflow all limits” and be at the same time “withdrawn from the world scene,” it is also true that only a metaphor could create such circumstances. Based on something as ethereal as emotions, a metaphor is capable of being beyond any limit, to the point of crossing the limits of its own existence and thus, according to Derrida, withdrawing from the world. But perhaps it is more objective to speak of the occasional invisibility of the metaphor and not of its absence. Previously, we observed that metaphors do not necessarily have to be materialized, in the sense of being a precisely palpable or visible sign, which can lead, in principle, to them going unnoticed. But in addition, we could ignore a metaphor if we ignore its existence or if we do not know how to recognize it. In other cases, metaphors may be invisible when they are ignored through habit or because of their naturalness.

Since a long time ago the metaphor has had several meanings and has been described, structured and operated in different ways, and the word metaphor has been mostly used to refer to metaphor as a literary figure or trope. Therefore, it is not surprising that the Peircean metaphorical icon has been put aside due to its differences with the literary metaphor in terms of form and function; but the truth is that Peircean metaphors are constantly

present in much of the reality that surrounds us, and of course in our main means of communication: language.

Once aware of what Peirce's metaphor really is and how it works, we can find many examples of its appearance in our lives as individuals and acknowledge our metaphorical experiences. The first perceptions of many of the things that symbolize something in our personal life were probably metaphorical experiences: the first time we heard a piece of music and we mentally moved to another time and space and we felt what we had felt at that time; the time we smelled something and re-lived certain emotions or thoughts we had experienced in the past; or when a certain unimportant object becomes "ours" and we feel close to it because its touch reminds us of another tactile experience, etc. We can have metaphorical experiences with all our senses, our very own experiences others could not share; experiences that, over time, become symbols of our past memories and emotions.

But metaphors do not always remain in the personal contour, they are also shared. Where metaphors are most vividly shared is in the arts and language: although the moment of scientific discovery are also metaphorical moments, when the discovery is shared it ceases to be a metaphor and is rather an index or a symbol. Now, artists aim for different ways of sharing their experience with the public; some guide the interpreter towards a metaphorical interpretation through signals such as the titles of the works. Thus, the interpreter has a hint in order to pass through a semiotic experience similar to the author's and, as a result, to feel his/her metaphorical experience. Others choose a more interactive and free way of transmitting the metaphorical experiences to the interpreter: through the lack of obvious signals. In this way, the minds that interpret the work are faced with a wide range of interpretive possibilities from which they can, and will, select the ones that best suit them regarding their thoughts and feelings at that time, their past experiences, and even their cultural and social level. So, at best, the interpreter constructs his/her own metaphorical icon from the metaphor that is in front of him/her thanks to the spectacular character of the metaphorical interpretant.

Another field where iconic metaphor often appears is language (both spoken and written). Precisely because of the influence of cognitive metaphor, especially the lexical one, in current linguistic thinking, it is important to bring the Peircean metaphor to everyday discourse. Since, in addition to the iconic poetic metaphors, there is a great number of "metaphorical indexes" in colloquial language which are also Peircean metaphors: the mechanisms of *evidentia* (ellipsis, repetition), role changes in dialogues, intonation and alliteration and certain mechanisms of control of the speech turn, etc.

But in both cases (art and language), the interpretation of the metaphor is not necessarily unique. While talking about artistic text Lotman points out

that “it offers different readers different information, depending on their capacity; it also offers the reader a language that allows him to assimilate a new piece of data in a second reading. It behaves like a living organism that is in inverse relation with the reader and teaches him” (Lotman, 1970, 36). We believe that any creative artwork shares these peculiarities and therefore allows multiple interpretations.

Once we have discussed the nature of iconic metaphor and its function and interpretation, we might ask ourselves a last question: are metaphors essentially objective or subjective? The truth is that both objectivism and subjectivism err in explaining how we understand the world through our interactions with it, and thus none can fully explain the iconic metaphor. As Lakoff and Johnson put it:

“What objectivism misses is the fact that understanding, and therefore truth, is necessarily relative to our cultural conceptual systems and that it cannot be framed in any absolute or neutral conceptual system. Objectivism also misses the fact that human conceptual systems are metaphorical in nature and involve an imaginative understanding of one kind of thing in terms of another. What subjectivism specifically misses is that our understanding, even our most imaginative understanding, is given in terms of a conceptual system that is grounded in our successful functioning in our physical and cultural environments. It also misses the fact that metaphorical understanding involves metaphorical entailment, which is an imaginative form of rationality” (Lakoff, Johnson, 1980, 193–194).

Thus, since Peircean metaphor is linked to both reason and imagination and intuition, it has both objective and subjective aspects. In its creation, it is abductive, i.e. intuitive and at the same time interfered by thought and experience, a fact that gives it degrees of subjectivity. On the other hand, the genuine metaphorical hypoicon is destined to the revelation of new epistemologies, to the correctness, and to the contribution to the truth and thus demands its interpretation to be as objective as possible. So, we could say that iconic metaphor is subjective in its creation and objective in its interpretation.

5. CONCLUSIONS: AN EXAMPLE OF ICONIC METAPHOR IN LANGUAGE

In order to better perceive what we have been suggesting about iconic metaphors and to bring all the discussed elements together, we propose an analytic study of a fragment of a poem by Jorge Luis Borges. We consider it appropriate to follow a model of analysis proposed by M. C. Haley, in his book *The Semeiosis of Poetic Metaphor* where Peircean signs, especially icons, are completely taken into account.

The model has six steps, of which the first four focus on the identification and interpretation of signs: in the first place the interpreter is confronted with symbols (i.e., linguistic signs, or words) that refer to two or more objects in different or disparate semantic domains. Consequently, the immediate interpretant related to sign/object/object creates a sense of semantic tension due to the contradiction of disparate objects. Then the interpreter forms what Haley calls an “indexical hypothesis” (Haley, 1988, 15) according to which the semantic tension must have a meaning: the semantic tension is a metaphorical “index” which refers to another object, necessarily an icon, a metaphorical icon, hence its definition as metaphorical index. In other words, semantic tension is an index of a metaphor as smoke is an index of fire. This hypothesis, Haley warns us, is not necessarily conscious or formal and may even be simply a feeling or assumption. The interpreter at this point begins to seek the certainty of the indexical hypothesis looking for an icon among the referents of the primary sign. If the interpreter does not find the sought icon, he will deny the hypothesis and, from this point on, any interpretation is entirely subjective. However, if the interpreter finds the icon, he will proceed to its interpretation in connection with its object. The success of this interpretation leads to the creation of at least one interpretant: the discovery of a parallelism or similarity in the ground of the sign.

Following Haley’s method and bearing the structure and the functions of iconic metaphors in mind, we are able to make a distinction, for example between poetic metaphors and iconic metaphors in figurative language, or recognize whether the phenomenon of pause we are dealing with means silence, absence, an invitation to reflection or is an iconic metaphor of another experience. We can also determine different levels of interpretation for cases of repetition (that could mean intensity, extension or indicate the evolution of the repeated word by virtue of an experience), alliteration (where phonetic effects can become iconic metaphors of the experience on which a text is based), negation (an icon of the implicit when made indirectly), anagrams (that beyond graceful games with letters and words can stand as iconic metaphors of a more complete meaning for them), parallelism (that other than unveiling hidden relations between elements in a text can iconically metaphorize the flow of a sensorial experience and its direction), ellipsis (that could have a grammatical or pragmatic function or could be an iconic metaphor of the implicit or nothingness), etc. In all these cases the iconic-metaphorical interpretation is always the most direct and profound one if not the most correct one possible. Here is an example:

*[...] The silence that inhabits the mirrors
has forced its prison.
Darkness is the blood
of wounded things.*

*In the uncertain twilight
the mutilated evening
was a few poor colours.*

(*Fervor de Buenos Aires, Atardeceres*, Jorge Luis Borges)

After a first reading, we note that the poet metaphorizes, through a poetic metaphor, his experience of the evening he is talking about, putting before the eyes of those who read the poem the picture of silence that overwhelms the environment (silence has forced its prison), the red colors of the sunset (the mutilated evening) and darkness that grips things, reducing them to poor, soft, pale colors. In other words, the poet expresses, through this metaphor, the experience of a quiet evening: a trail of blood (red colors of the sunset) on things, and then darkness and silence.

But a closer reading, unveils the metaphorical index created by the poet through a semantic tension, bringing the auditory to the domain of the visual (The silence that inhabits the mirrors); an index that invites to the discovery of an iconic metaphor. The absence of sound here is understood as the absence of image: experiencing the silence of the mirror is parallel to the actual experience of not being in the mirror. Given that Borges wrote this poem when he had lost vision in both eyes, both the silence of the mirror and the uncertainty and poverty of sunset colors must be interpreted as the iconic metaphors of blindness.

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