Analysing cartoons with the help of pragmatist semiotics

Anni Kangas
University Lecturer
School of Management
University of Tampere
~ 800 political cartoons

Charles Sanders Peirce (1839–1914), scientist, logician, semiotician and pragmatist philosopher
A study of political imaginary

- “A sign is something by knowing which we know something more” (CP 8.332)

- Transformation in Finnish-Russian relations 1917—1930s

- (Pragmatist) political imaginary
  - Belief-doubt-model of social action
  - political imaginary as a process whereby new knowledge emerges in problematic situations on the basis of previous knowledge and experience
  - previous experience embodied in image-symbols (Lotman)
Political imaginary

prepolitical

political

post/superpolitical
Political Imaginary as Sem(e)iosis

“by semiosis I mean ... an action, or influence, which is, or involves, a cooperation of three subjects, such as a sign, its object, and its interpretant, this tri-relative influence not being in any way resolvable into actions between pairs.”

PEIRCEAN TRICHOTOMIES:
- Firstness/secondness/thirdness
- Sign/object/interpretant
- Icon/index/symbol
- Rheme/dicent/argument
Peirce’s theory of signs

- Sem(e)iosis: the life of signs, metabolism and **sign variations**

- Based on Peirce’s philosophy:
  - Pansemiotic view of the universe: the world is experienced through/in terms of signs

- Motivated by Peirce’s pragmaticism: how signs stand for something or are interpreted as a part of some general societal process
  - How human beings / societies try to achieve a satisfactory relationship with other parts of their experience
  - “Puzzles of our worldly existence”
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Kategoria:</th>
<th>Representameniin</th>
<th>Objektiin</th>
<th>Interpretanttiin</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ensimmäisyys</td>
<td>Qualisign (tone)</td>
<td>Ikoni</td>
<td>Reema</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Toiseus</td>
<td>Sinsing (token)</td>
<td>Indeksi</td>
<td>Lause</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kolmannuus</td>
<td>Legisign (type)</td>
<td>Symbol</td>
<td>Argumentti</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

SIGN, OBJECT, INTERPRETANT

sign/representamen

interpretant

object
Sign, object, interpretant

- "a sign stands to somebody for something in some respect" (CP 2.228)
- **Object**: something that determines the sign
- **Interpretant**: effect of a sign on someone (some mind) reading or comprehending it
Tuulispää, helmikuu 1919. Välikysymykset eduskunnassa
Icon, index, symbol

- Characterizes the relationship of a sign to its object
- Icon stands for something because it resembles or imitates it
- Looks, feels, sounds or tastes like something or someone
Icon, **index,** symbol

- An index is a sign that denotes its object by virtue of an actual connection involving them.
- A relation which is ‘in fact’
- ‘Here and now’ aspect of a sign
- Compels attention but **does not convey information** (‘pure index’)

> Aspectuality of signs!
Icon, index, symbol

- "A Symbol is a Representamen whose Representative character consists precisely in its being a rule that will determine its Interpretant" (CP 2.292)

- Associated with their meaning by usage (arbitrariness)

- Conventions, laws, habits...

- Symbols are present in semiosis through their replicas
Peirce’s doctrine viewed as ‘a lantern with which inquirers can illuminate their footsteps, especially when exploring unfamiliar territory’ (Colapietro)
Peirce’s sign theory as a ‘lantern’

- ... not as a classificatory device
- ... a tool for posing questions and finding answers in research materials
- ... does is illuminate your steps?
» Take, for instance, ‘it rains’. Here the icon is the mental composite photograph of all the rainy days the thinker has experienced. The index is all whereby he distinguishes that day, as it is placed in his experience. The symbol is the mental act whereby [he] stamps that day as rainy. » (CP 2.438)

→ VISUALITY?
### GPCI-2011 Total score and rank by Functions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>City</th>
<th>Total Score</th>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>New York</td>
<td>320.9</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>322.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>London</td>
<td>320.6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>313.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Paris</td>
<td>308.7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>303.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Tokyo</td>
<td>304.3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>300.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Singapore</td>
<td>265.3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>244.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Berlin</td>
<td>234.8</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>232.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Seoul</td>
<td>233.4</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>228.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Hong Kong</td>
<td>231.1</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>222.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Amsterdam</td>
<td>226.6</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>212.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Frankfurt</td>
<td>225.1</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>212.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The world of cities