Jappy's neo-Peircean approach

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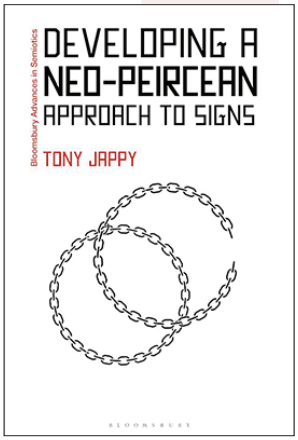

Tony Jappy

Developing a Neo-Peircean approach to signs

London: Bloomsbury Advances in Semiotics, 2024, pp.197,
ISBN 9781350288829, $91 (hbk), $81.90 (eBook).

The title of Jappy's new book – *Developing a Neo-Peircean approach to signs* – may cause strangeness due to the prefix 'neo,' just as it sounds strange in the concept of 'neo-human,' which refer to the human beings in relation to the many technological revolutions that brought us to the current world. Yet, just as 'neo-human' does not refer to anything post-human but to human beings in the specific context of the current world, Jappy's work does address the theory of C. S. Peirce and not something post-Peircean.

The term 'neo-Peircean' is not new. It was previously employed by Shapiro and Kull,[1] who worked on the relationship between semiotics and other areas, namely linguistics and biosemiotics. Jappy, on the other hand, focuses strictly on Peirce's semiotics. What led him to adopt the term 'neo-Peircean' was a series of criticisms directed against the application of Peirce's semiotics and the development of Peirce's systems of sign classification. Although in many ways more Peircean than the critics he addresses, Jappy recognizes that it is "potentially deceitful" to call contemporary Peirce-based semiotics as Peircean since Peirce himself never did a semiotic inquiry such as the ones he and other researchers are doing.

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[1] These are the authors Jappy refers to in the book. Other authors have also adopted the term neo-Peircean: Wilson and Price (2018), Wilson and Little (2016), Skaggs (2015), and Jacquette (2009).

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Researchers and students of Peirce's thought and semiotics will find in the book an excellent presentation of many of the issues yet to be discussed by Peircean semioticians. Chapters are devoted to careful exegeses of Peirce's published texts and unpublished manuscripts. Besides, all the new perspectives developed and proposed by the author are explicitly stated in the book as new and thus presented to the reader as matters to be discussed and not as finished ideas that must be accepted. The gerundive in the title, 'Developing,' also indicates that it is a work in process. In fact, the research on Peirce's semiotics is far from being finished: "the most important of Peirce's statements on signs have to be sought piecemeal from scattered published and unpublished sources, with the unfortunate consequence that the recently coined sobriquet 'neo-Peircean' denominates a research enterprise fraught with difficulties." (p. 2)

The book is divided into six chapters. The first one, dedicated to the relevance of Peirce's theory of signs, also deals with the challenges and obstacles to developing this theory. The following two chapters are quite exegetics. Chapter 2 presents Peirce's system of sign classification of 1903, and Chapter 3 deals with the transitional period between 1904 and the introduction of the concept of semiosis in 1907. Then come the chapters designated as neo-Peircean, which discuss the late systems of sign classification. Chapter 4, the least neo-Peircean chapter of the three, presents the system of 1908 and targets the hostile critical assessments of this system. Chapter 5 examines a draft left by Peirce of a curious system of ten classes in 1908 and discusses Peirce's semiotics in relation to contemporary studies. Chapter 6 associates the 1903 system, which is purely formal, with the idea of semiosis developed before it, in case studies illustrating the contributions of a hybrid neo-Peircean perspective.

The proposition of the neo-Peircean perspective in the last chapter depends on some conceptual discussions made throughout the previous chapters. Two of such concepts begin to be discussed in Chapter 1: the relationship between Peirce's classification systems of sciences and signs and the concept of semiosis. Peirce identified semiotics as one of the branches of normative sciences, which is part of cenoscopy, that is, of philosophy, a science that does not observe current events but is based on the careful examination of common thought, of ordinary experience (Kent 1987). What is currently called applied semiotics does not fit into this type of science. For Jappy, the applied semiotics practiced today belongs to the branch of special sciences, which Peirce also called idioscopy because this branch of science reaches new discoveries from observing current events (Kent 1987). It is essential to highlight the difference in the mode of observation used by each of the two sciences, as the issue of the mode of observation will reappear at the end of Chapter 5, where Jappy compares and ponders the current relevance of the Peircean perspective in view of the development of cognitive sciences, neurosciences, and semiotics in proposing models of knowledge, experience, and relationship with the environment.

The second fundamental discussion for developing Jappy's neo-Peircean approach, as well as Peirce's late systems of sign classes, is about semiosis. Throughout Jappy's book, the notion of semiosis appears repeatedly until it becomes central to the neo-Peircean perspective. In Chapter 3, semiosis appears in the discussion on the order of interpretants. It is also related to the classes of signs taken as classes of semiosis in manuscript R318. Finally, semiotics is defined as the doctrine of the essential nature and fundamental varieties of possible semiosis. With this perspective of classes of semiosis, Jappy makes his neo-Peircean proposal for approaching the sign in Chapter 4.[2]

Considering all the problems involved in dealing with a theory under development and not completed, Jappy chooses the chronological order in chapters 2, 3, and 4 to present the system of 1903 and the development of fundamental concepts in between to make sense of the 1908 system. Instead of abandoning it, as some have suggested, the author follows the most challenging and risky track, but the only one that may lead to a new discovery.

Even the presentation of the 1903 system, which establishes the ten classes of signs and was widely discussed by Peirce's commentators (Ransdell 1966, Savan 1988, Marty 1990, Liszka 1996, Santaella 2000), may surprise those familiar with Peirce's semiotics, as Jappy is cautious to avoid mistakes that some general presentations of Peirce's semiotics had done, which end up combining aspects of different periods without considering their context. One of the problems that permeated the reception of Peirce's work until recently was precisely the difficulty of accessing the texts and the poor quality of the first editions. Jappy uses the new sources available, namely the new chronological editions and manuscripts recently made available online, to make a fresh presentation of the system of 1903, which many people thought to be already consolidated.[3] The result is a careful discussion that returns to essential issues such as the difference between sign and representamen, the order of determination of the three correlates of the sign, the continuity or not of the processes of semiosis, the concept of degeneration, and hypoiconicity.

Chapter 3, entitled "The Transition," presents important aspects of Peirce's thought from 1903 to 1908 that led to the 1908 systems. Using published texts and several manuscripts from that time, Jappy shows that during this period, Peirce made the sign more complex by describing two objects and three interpretants and anticipated a typology of signs, which was later taken up again in 1908, when he presented six divisions for signs. These objects and interpretants, however, received various names until Peirce arrived at a proposal Jappy considers more regular.

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[2] The relevance of semiosis to Peirce's semiotic has also been defended by Fisch (1986). Other authors also adopt semiosis as a fundamental concept to understand the sign classes: Merrell (1996), Müller (1994), Queiroz (2004), Borges (2010, 2022), Deacon (2014).

[3] A great source for a chronological and exegetic approach that shows the development of Peirce's Speculative Grammar is Bellucci's book (2017).

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Another fundamental topic for developing Jappy's neo-Peircean perspective, the notion of sign as a medium, is also presented in Chapter 3 as a theoretical novelty of the transition period. The definition of the sign as a medium of communicating a form brings up an important discussion about what is the form of the dynamic object communicated in the sign by the immediate object.[4] The answer found by Jappy in a manuscript is that this form is not a singular thing. Otherwise, it would cease to be in the object when it passes into the sign (R 793 4-5, 1906). The notion of object, therefore, expands in relation to the 1903 proposal and cannot be restricted to an existent. This notion is essential for understanding the 1908 proposal of a division of the sign that considers the nature of the dynamic object.[5]

Finally, Chapter 3 advances the discussion on the division of icons. While the previous chapter presented the well-known and widely discussed division of hypoicons (found in the 1903 Syllabus to the Lowell Lectures), this chapter presents four different divisions of icons found in manuscripts that are practically unknown or scarcely discussed. A table summarizes the four versions of the subclasses of icons that should feed a necessary re-discussion of the texts that deal with hypoicons (Nöth 1990, Farias 2002, Farias and Queiroz 2006, Santaella 1995, Jappy 2019 and 2014, and Borges 2010).

In Chapter 4, the neo-Peircean approach begins to be presented. Jappy discusses the notion of category in relation to the universe, which is a recurring concept employed in 1908 to describe the divisions of signs. While categories are related to phaneroscopy, the notion of universe is related to logical concepts, such as the notion of set. Jappy bases his neo-Peircean proposal on the hierarchical principle of the universe, which is the same as the principle of categories, since phenomenology precedes and nourishes logic in the classification of sciences.

Next, he discusses the interpretants and the order of determination of the divisions of the sign, considering semiosis and the idea that the classes of signs are classes of semiosis. This leads to the conclusion that the 1908 hexadic system shows a flow of determination that implies a process driven by a purpose, not by chance.[6]

From the hexadic division, Jappy chooses four sign correlates for his discussion: the two objects, the sign, and the final interpretant. From their discussion, he dedicates the end of the chapter to showing (1) how the idea of universes linked to objects leads to an ontological system, (2) how intention and purpose are related to the final cause, and how the final interpretant leads to a classification of the "telic nature of semiosis and the precise purpose of the sign" (p. 109); and (3) how the 1908 system has a dynamism specific to the idea of semiosis that the 1903 system did not have.

[4] On the relation of Peirce's thought to communication see: Bergman (2009).
[5] On the notion of Peirce's object see: Borges (2023).
[6] On the order of the trichotomies see also: Müller (1994), Flórez and Mesa (2021), Borges and Franco (2022).

Although the decadic sign division and the 66 sign classes were also proposed in 1908, Jappy declares that deriving the 66 classes is not a priority of his study. He does not even approach the 28 sign classes resulting from the hexadic division. As a justification, Jappy states that he does not want to promote an extended classification based on the divisions in this book. His neo-Peircean approach is, therefore, restricted to the hexadic sign division. The reader interested in the 28 sign classes, the decadic sign division, and the 66 sign classes, however, should not be discouraged. All that has been presented so far, along with Jappy's approach to the hexadic sign division, are relevant and necessary for thinking about sign systems of any size.

Chapter 5 begins by consolidating the idea that the 1908 hexad is not just a typology but a representation of the process of semiosis. This idea of semiosis is corroborated by how Peirce constructs a diagram with ten classes at the end of the draft of a letter to Lady Welby dated December 28, 1908. Unlike the ten classes proposed in 1903, which consider the mode of being of the sign itself and the relations between sign and object and between sign and interpretant, the ten classes in this letter concern the correlates of the sign ordered as three stages of semiosis. That is, the mode of being of the dynamic object determines the mode of being of the sign, which in turn determines the mode of being of the final interpretant.

An important difference between the ten classes of 1903 and the ten classes proposed in 1908 is that the classes of 1903 do not depend on knowing the identities of the object and the interpretant. In the 1908 system of ten sign classes, signs cannot be analyzed without this information. The procedural perspective proposed by Peirce in 1908 to compose ten classes of signs may lead us to rethink an idea widely spread among commentators: that the 1903 system of ten classes is a consolidated system and the one with which we can perform semiotic analyses, while the others would be weaker, unfinished proposals. The mere fact that Peirce redesigned the system of ten classes may indicate that in 1908, he was rethinking what he had proposed in 1903. In addition, if we want to avoid taxonomic typologies that name signs without explaining their mode of action, I dare say that adopting the ten classes of 1908 may be a solution, or rather, the first step before reaching the system of 66 classes, which resists any taxonomic approach.

Readers interested in semiotic approaches to observing phenomena will find in Chapter 6 some examples of how the 1903 and 1908 systems can be used, their advantages, and how they can be combined in Jappy's neo-Peircean approach. Several discussions may arise from these examples. For instance, Jappy restricts the idea of the dynamic object to the individual intention of the utterer of the message, disregarding the social context, which usually reveals the purpose of the message. As the approach only considers the six divisions of the sign, excluding the relation between the sign and its object, Jappy recourses to the hypoicons to deal with the

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relation between sign and object, which he calls a hybrid approach. Such a procedure, however, would be unnecessary in an approach considering the ten divisions since they include the relationship between sign and object, and thus the issues concerning the icons.

Regardless of these and other minor details concerning the analyses in the last chapter, Jappy's book is much welcome. After a fruitful time for Peircean semiotic studies that began with the publication of the first editions of Peirce's writings, criticisms of applications of Peirce's semiotics and the studies on the classifications of signs such as the ones Jappy discussed in Chapter 1 resulted in a decline in these studies. Jappy's book is a necessary resumption of semiotic approaches committed to Peirce's thought, even more so due to its careful exegesis of Peirce's texts. A response to the critics of semiotics began to be given, and I hope it will stimulate others.[7]

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[7] For an approach on the iconic signs in Peirce's extended classes see: Farias and Queiroz 2006, and Borges (2013). See also the discussion on metaphors and the objects of a sign made by Hausman (1987).

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