

## **Discourse and representation:**

*Ideas for the configuration of the visual text*

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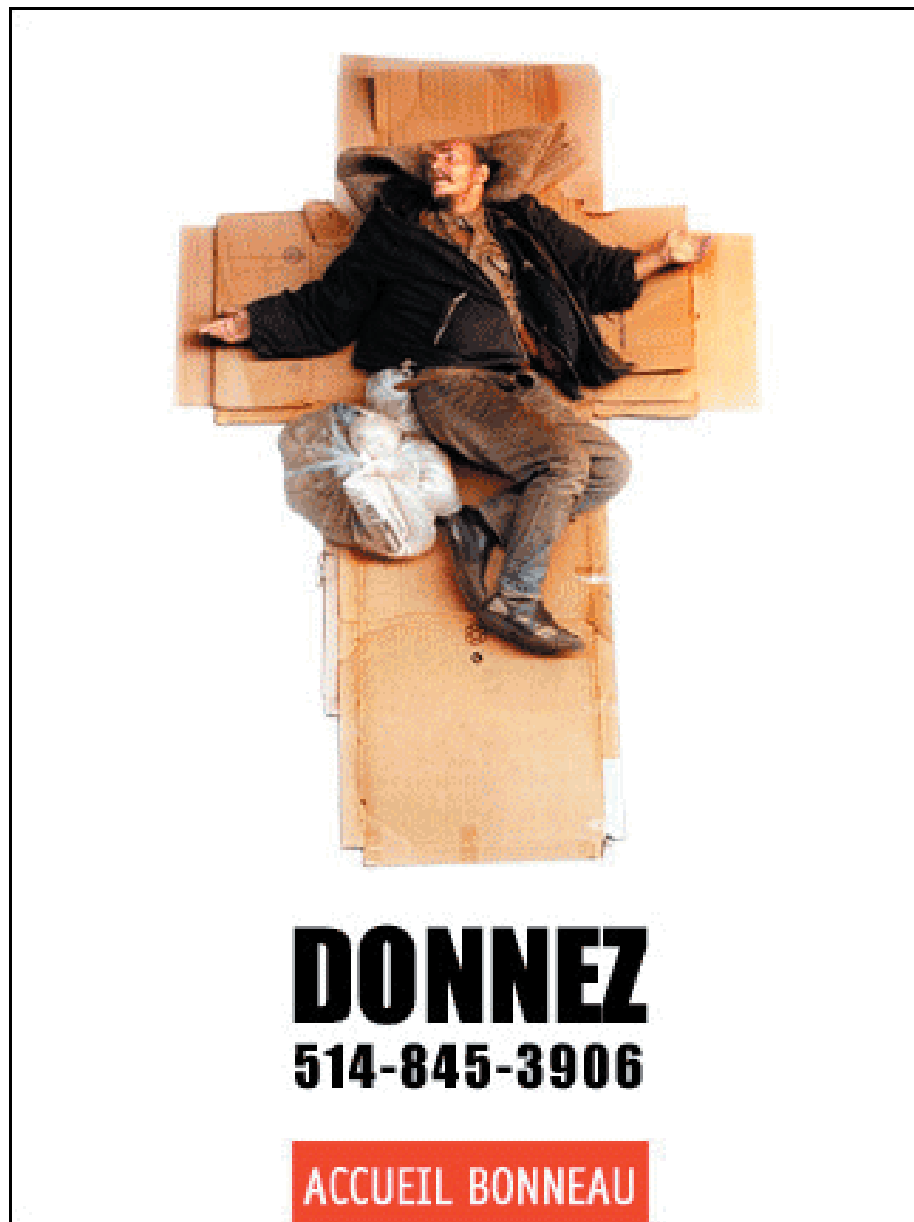
## Introduction

Everyday we are exposed to a myriad of images that are made with particular communicative purposes. We are involved in a never-ending process of discrimination interpretation and appropriation of the meanings proposed by those images, and it is almost impossible to *swallow* all and every piece of information out there; that is why we select to read what seems to be in our universe of interests and understandings.

Images are proposing information but in most of the cases, especially in advertising, those images are also providing us with signs that activate our aesthetic approach to the world by pushing the buttons of feelings. How is possible that sometimes, we don't understand the meaning of an image but anyway it is provoking a multitude of feelings on us. It is possible that the information is not clear and at the same time we are experiencing feelings of pleasure, anger or angst. We can say: I don't know why but I don't like it, it's disgusting. How does that come?

This text is a response to the feelings provoked by every-day images, and it is an attempt to understand and explore explanations of the reading processes of visual communication. To achieve that goal, I have placed visual communication within the studies of *text and discourse* and I tried to give arguments that explain how the image belongs to that sphere.

To build up my ideas on the construction of representation, I took an example found on the streets of Montreal. It is an image inviting the people to help the homeless of the city. I took this example because of the symbolic qualities that are shown in the construction of that visual text. This work anyway is not centered in the analysis of the figure but it is used as a pedagogical device to explain some of the conceptual approaches cited here.



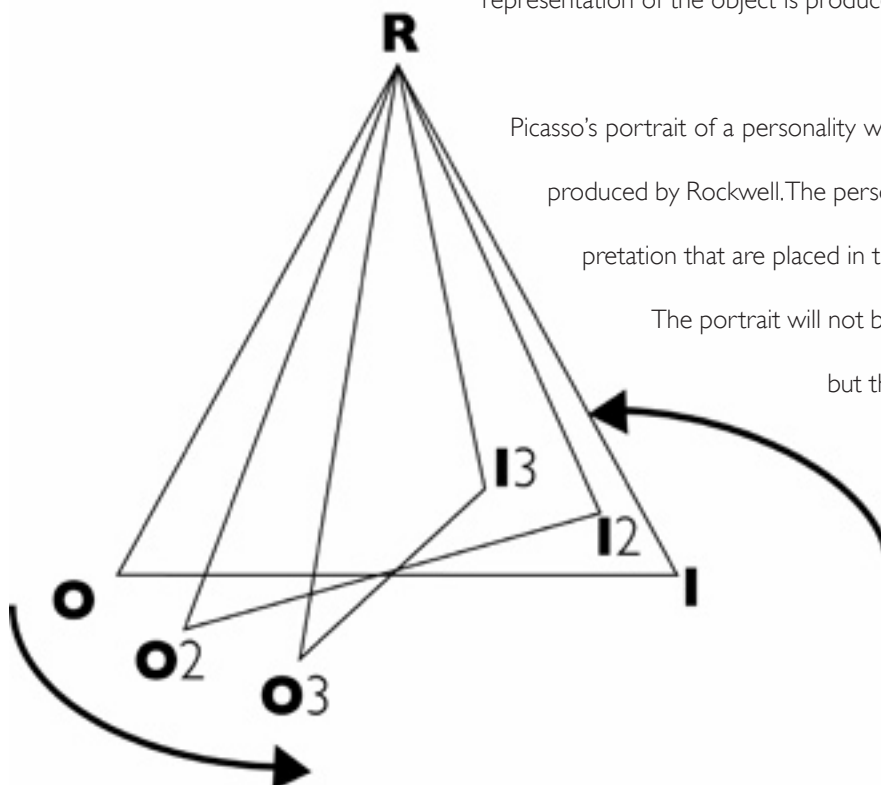
**Figure 1. Poster found in the streets of Montreal**

It is needed to talk about Discourse and Representation to understand how these two concepts cohabite, contain each other, relate each other or repel each other. It could be said that Discourse and Representation have a “natural” relation. If we consider a discourse depending on language, there cannot be discourse without representation, language at last is but a system of representations. On the opposite way, we could propose that some representations of objects are representing discourses as well. Any representation is subject to interpretation and it has to be read and in the moment of its configuration inevitably discursive relations are established.

**Figure 2. Multiple semiotic triangle.**

*This expression is showing how one Representation could have a reference to different Objects and Interpretants. In this case O2 and I2 will refer to the discourse from where interpretation should be performed.*

A portrait for example, is representing the referred person. It is a visual depiction that directs to a certain interpreting frame. It is given by means of a graphic technique, a format, color, composition and so on. It is possible to recognize the person but is also possible to recognize the fact that the object is a portrait and it has to be interpreted as such. The picture is representing at the same time the object and the discourse. The portrait is not the discourse but the representation of the discourse from which the representation of the object is produced.



Picasso's portrait of a personality will produce a very different interpretant than the produced by Rockwell. The person should remain the same but the hints of interpretation that are placed in the interpretant will direct to different discourses. The portrait will not be the discourse of Picasso's painting and Cubism, but the representation of them.<sup>1</sup>

**Substitution:** *The idea of representation*

In his essay "Représentation", Ginzburg constructs around the substitution of the king by a representation (Ginzburg 1998). He starts his argumentation placing the ambiguity of the term *Representation*. In one hand it is placed in the reality that represents, hence evokes absence; at the other side it is a presence while bringing visible the reality. In the first case representation is a *substitution* thus, it has value because of the absence of the represented object; in the latter, the *presence* of the representation determines reality and the sign gains value by its own.

Absence and presence are the dialectic node of the discussion and was also the theological discussion that brought to a ban visual representations on the Catholic Church fearing for the idolatry and worship of images of Saints. It was until Pope Gregorius Magnus proclaimed that "*images are for the illiterate, like the words for those who know to read*", that the Catholic Church became more open in acknowledging the communicative and educational capacity of visual representations.

In the case of the example used in this essay (Figure 1), the representation of the homeless man is not pretending the substitution of Jesus Christ but is a sign occupying his place. By taking the position on the cross the man is acquiring some of the symbolic qualities that represent Christ. We are talking of a substitution of a sign by other sign from a distinct paradigm. That is a *Metaphor*, a Rhetorical figure of sense. In the section of Metaphors I will argue and develop some ideas to explain this concept.

The representation can go from a very coded symbol where resemblance is not important to a very iconic fascimil where the replication of the represented object is the goal. In the representation of Christ the realistic sculptures that are found all around the globe in Catholic temples have the intention of replacement, of substitution. In a way those sculpted images are bringing Christ to the Temple by its presence. By other hand the use of the symbol of the fish is also representing Jesus Christ but is

not intending substitution but connotation of abstract qualities using a sign as part of a very coded semiotic system of religious representations. Paradoxically, the virtually perfect image of Jesus Christ is carrying less information than the one provided by the symbol of the fish. The iconic nature of the former insists in the perceptual qualities of the object while the latter is referring to a more complex object that has been learned and decodes using a more sophisticated semiological frame. (Figure 3)



**Figure 3. Two representations of Christ**

The image as text has been widely accepted, and has been analyzed as such by authors like E.H. Gombrich. In his essay "Visual image: its place in communication" (Gombrich 2000) describes three basic functions of language and applies them to image analysis and explanation. Following the classification proposed by Karl Bühler, Gombrich explains how *expression*, *activation* and *description* are functions of language that are present in visual representations; and how further analysis could be carried out from this perspective.

Under this classification, the *expressive* function is informing over the state of mind of the author; Gombrich explains how the signs on the statement could be symptoms that show the mood of the author at the moment of text construction. In this case the *expression* could be anger, sadness or passion, but that doesn't mean that the same feelings will be produced on the side of the reader.

The second function is precisely how specific feelings and states of mind are *activated* on the reader of the text while exposed to the *expression*. Some times *expression* and *activation* could belong to the same sphere but not necessarily. An expression of anger could produce laugh on the reader, while the author could express a very calm statement to produce happiness and gay.

The third function is *description*. From this standpoint, language can be very precise and accurate in the expression of present, future or past situations by the use of logic inferences. It is the descriptive function that carries most of the *information*, it is the objective content of the text. In some cases this function is very limited on the realms of the visual image, but it could be very valuable when the signs acquire certain amount of symbolic norm and the information is provided in a way that cannot be represented with other forms of codification. A vivid example of this kind of images are maps, which provide big amounts of information that cannot be provided by any other means. (Figure 4)





### Figure 4. The descriptive qualities of the image

As far, Gombrich would say that the activation function has supremacy<sup>2</sup> over the other two in the case of the visual image (Gombrich 2000). The expressive function is problematic due to the wide open polysemy of the image and the enunciative or descriptive function, requires most of the time the support of the written text to contextualize the reading. What is interesting here, is that even if the expressive function and the descriptive function require the context to realize a precise lecture, the activation function seems to work independently in feeling production.

The example (Figure 1) is a big format poster found on the streets of Montreal. In this case I could recognize feelings of compassion, pity and sadness independently of the content of the message. In fact before I could read any structured message from the text, those activations were determining my reading position.

It seems that activation comes in front of the reading line, and establishes a *reading mood*, and a *reading mode*. In this case the presentation of a roofless man with his belongings beside him and resting on a cardboard cross, is clearly showing a *Pathos* approach<sup>3</sup> that directs to the sphere of feelings. In the other hand it is proposing a *reading mode* inserted in the tradition of Christian mythology. Without this context of a symbolic tradition, the image will lose any possibility of configuring adequate meanings.

Of course not every visual text is addressing the reading to emotions, the *activation* function of a chart or a road map that are both visual texts is related almost directly with the *expression*, positioned on the *logos* and proposing the reading of a comprehensive description through a normative symbolic structure (Figure 4).

Reading is sequential even if the succession of events is as fast as to consider it simultaneous, it is true that interpretation is a sequence of semiotic moments. The idea of activation as presented by Gombrich let me propose that the *reading mode* would be established by the expression of the text, and it is a previous moment of interpretation. The *reading mood* is in fact what Gombrich is referring to activation. It is produced on the reader when exposed to the expression. The *reading mood* could establish a cognitive frame for the reading, a state of mind that will allow to interpret from different stand points.

To continue with the example of the "Christ of Montreal" (Figure 1) the proposed *reading mood* is in the house of humanitarian feelings related with the philosophy of the Catholic Church. If we place ourselves in that mood, it is likely that we understand the urgency of helping the roofless and maybe we would call to the given number. But nothing can assure that the readers will assume that reading mood; another mood could be activated and another reading configured.

The visual text presented in the poster is proposing a reading in this sense:

1. Place your self in a Catholic mithology.
2. Stand on your feelings of pity and compassion.
3. Recognize the visual statements as metaphors and configure a text concerning the situation of the homeless people.

From the semiotic triangle of the Peircean Theory of sign<sup>4</sup>, we can think on a multiple structure where the same representamen shares different objects and interpretants (Figure 2), thus proposing diverse meaning possibilities in the same semiosic process. A sequential approach of the text will be held to produce reading positions. The discourse in which the text is located will be identified from this front processes, as well as the rhetorical approach from which the reader will produce meaning.

**Culture and Context:** *The ground where text is constructed.*

Levi –Straus says that the nature is a continuum and the culture is a mechanism to segment and give certain order to that continuum. As Nature is normalized, it is transformed in a discrete system. The difference between Nature and Culture is norm. Thus, Culture is a group of sign systems available to a certain collectivity, it explains and structures the picture of the world that prevails in certain historic moment. (Lévi-Strauss 1962)

Kroeber y Kluckhohn define Culture as a group of behavioral forms (implicit or explicit) that are acquired and transmitted through symbols. They consider these symbols as singularities of human groups, for these authors, environment is the symbolic media produced by man. (Kroeber; Kluckhohn et al.)

Leslie White adds that Culture is conformed by every single act that depend on symbols, it is manifest in individuals as much as in objects and in interaction processes. Models, norms and rules are the conventions constructing the Culture, they are the cognitive structures of a determined society. (White 1975)

**Figure 5. Three different trees**

*The text allows the image to acquire different semantic constructions.*



The cultural context will provide with valuable hints on the configuration of proper meaning that in some cases the image alone is not capable to give. If I show a beautiful illustration of a tree to any given public without saying anything else, it is likely that the group will not construct any valuable meaning from the visual statement. The image will be seen as the representation of a tree and will stand as an iconic sign for the tree.

According to Information theory (Shannon 1963) redundancy operates in the construction of significant communication, hence the use of more than one channel will help in the interpretation of the information. In this sense, the image together with a written text will allow to produce other semantic operations. (Figure 5)



The context helps also to avoid ambiguity on the reading. If the representation of the tree is part of the information system in the botanic garden, the reader will produce more meaningful information according to that situation. Sometimes the sole context will provide sufficient information for accurate reading of the image and any written text is needed. History by other hand, had constructed symbolic systems in which the image is attached; if the links with these traditions are broken, meaning wont be produced as expected. In the case of the of "The Christ of Montreal" (Figure 1), the image is highly dependent on the knowledge of the Christian tradition. Following the reading



of semantic layers it is possible to find the iconic tradition of the Christian hood in two important elements: The cross and the crucifixion position of the mendicant. (Figure 6)

**Figure 6. The Crucifixion**

*Annibale CARRACCI, Crucifixion, 1583..*

*ACCUE BONNEAU, Donnez, 2003.*

*El GRECO, The Crucifixion 1596-1600*

It is evident as reading the illustration (Figure 1) that the image of the crucifix is the central element of the expression. It is made by card-board but that is part of another semantic level. The cross has been the most important symbol of the Christian hood and it is widely accepted and understood by Christians and non-Christians. It is like the double triangular star for the Jews. It is a symbol that stands for the whole concept of the Church. As explained in the article "Crucifix" by Wadsworth Group/Thomson Learning,

"the symbol of the crucifix seems to appear in Rome in the 5th century but it would not enjoy widespread popularity and ritual use until the medieval period. The art of the early Middle Ages tended to depict Jesus on the cross with no trace of suffering, reflecting the theological emphasis on the Resurrection, and hence, Jesus' immunity to suffering and death. By the 13th century, there is an increase in the importance of the Incarnation and the humanity of Jesus, the crucifix, now showing Jesus' body twisted and bleeding on the cross, became established as the altar centerpiece in most churches and cathedrals, and as the favored object of contemplation of the mystics. The medieval Catholic Church, placed suffering at the center of its doctrine of salvation. The crucifix served as a complex symbol of Christ's sacrifice for humanity, the fullness of his human nature, the depth of tragedy that is overcome by the Resurrection, and as a kind of model for imitation. While the form of the cross boasts a rich symbolic tradition in the ancient world (i.e., the ankh of Egypt, the swastika of India, and the Tau cross of the Greeks), the crucifix, as distinct from the cross, is unique to Christianity. As presented in the four gospels, the crucifixion of Jesus is the culminating drama of his Passion, where, according to the gospels, Jesus, still bearing the marks of crucifixion in his hands and feet, rises from the dead on the third day, thereby conquering death".

Originally the Crucifix represented the passion of Christ and the conquer of death through Resurrection, but it can be read now-a-days as the image of Catholic Religion associated with humanitarian feelings such as mercy and pity. It is clear that the *expression* in our example is proposing the readers to establish a *Pathos* frame to interpretation, and it is possible that the *activation* of the image on the reader goes into the same direction of the *expression*. The reading *mode* is clearly positioned in the Catholic tradi-

tion, while the reading *mood* is proposed towards humanitarian feelings. The problem arises when trying to built meaning, to construct useful information. We have the representation of a poor homeless man taking the position of Christ crucified. Crucifixion is a very deep symbol that is barely understood by the majority. The idea that Jesus Christ died in that way to forgive our sins is something difficult to conceptualize.

In any case, this image (Figure 1) is presenting a crucifixion but is substituting the figure of Jesus by a homeless man, and the cross by a card-board bed. To construct meaning from there is needed to understand why this substitution took place.

Roland Barthes (Barthes and Heath 1977) talked about the *work* and the *text*. Where the *work* is the physical construct of signifiers that becomes a text only when read. In that sense the text is never fixed or stable but is continually being recreated out of the work.

According to Yuri Lotman (Lotman 1990) a text is an *intelligent object* in terms of three premises of semiotic structures.

1. They carry information,
2. They create new information, and
3. They preserve and reproduce the information (memory).

He argues that one intelligence needs another intelligence in order to function, and from this point of view, semiotic structures are intelligent because they carry information. Through them and from them, is possible to create new information, and to preserve and reproduce it.

Trying to understand Lotman's thought, it appears to me that these semiotic instances are like packages that we have to open and re-open in a continuum that allows preservation, and creation of meaning.

When talking about information in a communicational process, the absolute identity of meaning on the side of the producer and on the side of the reader is impossible. For that to happen, every single circumstance and code sharing should be identical, and even in the case where the producer and the reader are the same, there are code adjustments in the process of reading that allows to create a new text. In these terms the meaning of the text is always changing even if the form prevails.



According to Stuart Hall (Hall 1980) encoding and decoding is a process based on a model of *production-distribution-(re)production* where the object of the practices are *meaning and message* in the form of sign vehicles. He establishes that each moment of the production is an articulation that makes a circuit of meaning.

Hall thinks on the circuit as an articulation of moments and practices where the object produced is *meaning*, so it has to be studied – in terms to understand those practices and moments – under the frame of language and under the rules of code sharing. He identifies the moments of *encoding* at the side of the producer and *decoding* at the side of the receiver, as two independent and crucial moments that articulate the communication practice.

Before any message can be *used* or can *satisfy a need*, it has to be appropriated as a meaningful discourse and meaningfully decoded. The codes of encoding and decoding may not be symmetrical, but there should be some identity between them so meaningful construction can be done.

Hall claims that a discursive practice is a practice of representation and that any representation is mediated by language, so every understanding of the reality is mediated by representation, thus by signs, and it belongs to the discursive sphere.

Every code is a specific cultural construction and there is not any intelligible discourse without the operation of a code. Visual representation according to Hall, shouldn't be considered as a natural code even if its learning and appropriation seems to be in that way. There are not natural codes.

González Ochoa by other hand explains how the act of seeing is learned as any other interpretive capability, and he argues against the notion supposed as common sense that vision gives a literal representation of reality and that the eye has had always supremacy over other senses. He explains that the configuration of knowledge and the way we

acquire it has been changing and is a discursive construction of an epoch. In this way he establishes that the predominant position of the vision is a construction built until the XV century and reinforced during Renaissance.(González Ochoa 2001)

Coming back to Hall, he clarifies and distinguishes the manner in which we construct meaning making relations of signification. He argues that connotation and denotation show the different levels at which ideologies and discourses intersect, but is dependant on the relations that the reader is capable to adhere to a text that polysemy is constructed. (Hall 1980)

The connotative level is open to more active transformation on the side of the reader; every sign connotes a quality, situation, value or inference and codes clearly *contract* relations for the sign with the universe of ideologies in a society. This relations refer signs to 'the map of meanings' into which any culture is classified.

Even if *discursive domains* are hierarchically organized into dominant or *preferred meanings*, and it is possible to order, classify and decode an event within more than one mapping, there exist also a pattern of *preferred reading*. Hall places the *preferred meanings* on the side of the producer of the text and the *preferred reading* on the side of the audience.

Reading, says Hall, is the capacity to identify and decode certain number of signs and also the subjective capacity to put them into a creative relation with other signs. It is not possible a transparent reading, but neither an aberrant reading. There is always some degree of reciprocity between the encoding and decoding moments.

**Translation:** *The asymmetrical relations of written text and image.*

An interpretation is placed instead of a precise correspondence. Instead of a symmetrical transformation, an asymmetrical translation is produced. The reader always has to take interpretive decisions, so every text should be taken as new and the translation as a creative act. (Lotman 1990)

The asymmetrical relation and the constant interpretive decisions makes translation an act of producing new information. Particularly interesting is the situation where there is not only a difference in code sharing but also a different language that supposes untranslatability, like in the case of translating a verbal statement to a visual text.

Translation is realized with aid of an equivalence system accepted in a particular culture. Translating a verbal code to an image code there will be some overlapping in the semantic level whereas the syntactic level will be related only conventionally under the rules of a particular tradition. The combination of translatability/non-translatability is determining the creative function of the text. For the eyes of the reader, the text will be always a metonymy of a reconfigured whole meaning. It becomes a discrete sign of a non-discrete essence.

Under the complex operations of sense production, language is inseparable of the expressed content. In any case, the reader searches for an indication that points out the code to use in the reconfiguration of the text. Even the appearance of a new code derives from a tradition that is recalled and actualized by the historical memory of the text, so in any given situation, the text is a lesson of its own language.

Following Lotman, there are two kinds of text generators. One is found on the discrete and the other in continuum. Even if these two kinds of generators have their own structure, there are between them a constant exchange of text and messages. This exchange is presented in the form of semantic translation.

Any suitable translation presupposes an equivalent relation among the unities of both semiotic systems. As a result one system could be represented in terms of the other. In any case, translation seems impossible in principle when acting with discrete and non-discrete systems. I should consider the visual image as belonging to a non-discrete system. And the written text as part of a discrete system. The equivalent of a discrete unity with more precise limits, becomes a foggy sign with open relations of meaning in the other system. Given these factors we found that direct translation is not possible, so the result will be a sort of equivalent approximations determined by the cultural context that is common to both systems. These kind of non-precise translation is a very powerful creative tool due to the semantic connections emerging as generators of brand new texts.

It is in this point where the image as a communicative device acquires power. The open ended semantic capacity allows the image to configure and reconfigure meaning and sense, depending on context and on the creative use of the rhetorical tools. As a non-equivalent translation should be done, the only possibility to relate discrete and non discrete signs is substitution by tropes. This rhetorical figures will allow to construct the semiotic relations for the configuration of the visual text when departing from a written (and discrete) statement.

**Tropes:** *The rhetorical tool for translation*

Two elements from different systems related by an adequate relation given by cultural context, form a semantic trope. Tropes, then are not only external ornamentations but constitute the heart of creative thinking that goes far beyond the limits of art. As much in poetry as in science an illegitimate juxtaposition brings always the formulation of a new statement.

Jacobson distinguishes two basic forms of tropes, metaphors and metonymies and relates them with the two axes of language as described by Saussure: the paradigmatic and the syntagmatic (syntactic). (Jakobson 1981)

According to this author, a metaphor is the substitution of a concept in the realms of the paradigmatic axis, is a selection in a series, a substitution in absence and the establishment of a semantic link by similarity with the object. A metonymy is disposed on the syntactic axis and is not a selection but a combination in presence that involves a relation by contiguity.

The effect of a trope does not come from the presence of common semantic centers but from the dispersion of those centers in incompatible semantic spaces and from the degree of semantic distance among them. It is a question of conventions, approximations, suppositions. It is a work that involves the creation of a semantic situation that is new and paradoxical. A Trope is a figure born in the intersection point of two languages

There are several languages filling out the semiotic space, and they are related among them in different translatability degrees. From the complete transparent translation to total untranslatability. (imagine to paint a poem)

The fact that unification of two different languages is performed by a metaphor demonstrates the essential differences among them. Anyway we should consider that differ-

ent languages have diverse circulation speeds and periods: visual language transforms more rapidly and cannot be compared with the periods of transformation of literary systems.

Above this, in every single stage there is an historic contact with texts that were part of the semiosphere<sup>6</sup> (to use the term coined by Lotman) in precedent moments. Every element in the semiosphere are in a dynamic co-relation because of the asymmetry found on it. The asymmetry found its expression in the internal translation streams, that flows from one side to another of the semiosphere, then, translation becomes a primary mechanism of consciousness: to express something in other language is a way to comprehend and appropriate it. As there is no direct semantic correspondence in the asymmetry of languages, the semiosphere is generating new information in every moment.

Lotman thinks of the semiosphere as an ever-changing system of languages (a system of systems). From there, we can understand that there are different semiospheres for different cultures in historical moments. This semiotic differentiations have soft boundaries that intersect with other ones at the periphery, and it is there where mayor revolutionary changes take place. Periphery is the area of semiotic movement. Is the tension area where new language is created and is always much more revolutionized than the center.

The boundaries of the semiosphere are like a soft tissue where is possible to integrate external texts to the internal paradigm. Mayor semiotic revolutions could bring to a cultural equalization and to a creation of a new semiosphere of another order where both parts can be included. (think on electronic multimedia)

There is a semiotic relation that allows the construction of rhetoric figures such as a metaphor. From that stand point, I can infer some basic relations in the construction of a metaphor. A metaphor is a sign that stands for other of a different kind that activates a cognitive process that produces the shifting of an *object* and an *interpretant* of a sign to use them with a sign vehicle of another.

"A homeless is a Christ"

Placing a dispossessed man instead of Christ is a visual Metaphor. The Roofless is dying on the cross like Jesus, but his cross is a bunch of card-board boxes arranged like a cross. In replacing the sign of Jesus, the man is suffering himself the martyr and eventually the dead of Christ. It is in a vulnerable position gained innocently without any guilt. There are not any Roman soldiers but the society in general takes the place of them. The cross is made of garbage, of trash; it is also a metaphor standing for poverty, for the forgotten, for the cheapest material available. The martyr is the less important, a disposable asset.

This statement is a metaphor that allows the transfer of the qualities found in the sign *Christ* to the sign *Homeless*. It is the transfer of the *object* by the position of a new *interpretant*. The use of a metaphor facilitates the understanding of abstract concepts that cannot be transferred directly because they are part of different paradigms. The *object* of the sign *Christ*, is replacing the *object* of the sign *Homeless*. The *interpretant* should also change, but as a new one that allows the producing of a different meaning. It cannot be the one used in the semiosis of *Homeless* but neither the *interpretant* of the sign *Christ*.

The signifying attributes of the sign are placed in the semantic dimension, thus in the object's qualities. The Interpretant will help to do the right semiosis and not mistake the intended meaning. The signifying qualities of a metaphor are placed in the object of the

sign. The Interpretant is placed in the social world, so all the conventional inferences of the sign have to be placed in this part of the sign structure. The Interpretant of a metaphor is a convention. The audience must know that we are using a metaphor thus we are talking in a figurative way. This is something that we learn is a complex code that we share with others. This statement places the metaphor in the third layer of the relations of the sign with its object. Then a metaphor is a symbol. There are other rhetoric figures that are not necessarily symbols. For example a Metonymy or a Synecdoche are indexes because they are substitutions of a sign for another of the same paradigm with a direct relation. It cannot be symbolic because we don't need a convention to understand the meaning. "Her steps are following me" The steps are in place of herself, that is a direct relation because the steps don't exist without her. There is not substitution of the object of the sign but it is substitution of the Interpretant.



I will support the idea that every representation is a text that has to be circumscribed in a certain discourse to make sense. Discourse is formed by a number of texts or representations within one or several semiotic systems. A discourse as well as a representation allow meaning configuration. A discourse is thought generally as a complex system of texts with a narrative structure that invites the reader to build a whole sense from the denotations and connotations derived from it. A discourse could be considered a semiotic system in itself.

In a narrative sense, a discourse has a given structure with an entrance and an exit, but as a semiotic system is not linear but iterative. It could be a system of related texts from which the reader constructs meaning. The discursive proposal implies an index for the reading, implies some clues of paradigmatic fields from which the reader should take the interpretants that will allow to integrate the different texts and representations in the search of meaning production. It implies also a narrative proposal through the presentation of rhetorical devices, and of course implies the act of the reading itself. In this sense the discourse could be considered a complex representation that stands for a complex object.

It is likely to be thought that in the realms of visual representations there is no space for narrative and discourse, but I consider that there is not any representation without certain amount of narrative-reading processes. It is a fact that every representation needs some amount of time to be read and thus the knowledge of a reading code. Reading is a sequential act, not necessarily linear but iterative, where interpretive micro-acts are following each other to create the sense of representation. There is not such a thing as the reading of a simultaneous representation: without time. Reading could be brief and the iterative process very short: the lines could be represented as points but reading exists, thus time is always involved. As visual representation are meant to be read under certain codes and require time for interpretation, they can be considered as texts.

An alphabetic character, a mathematical symbol, a photo or a logotype are visual representations that can be considered as texts, they require interpretation. The announcement used to show the location of the public rest-rooms needs in terms of usefulness, an effort of the reader to understand the proposed direction; the reader also compares the forms of the signs to avoid any possible mistake and reads also the sign for the other gender; just to be sure where to enter. If this was a new pictogram for the reader, he would have to discover its narrative while reading the visual forms. Form, contour, color, format, position, style, material, or contrast, would be some of the visual codes to decipher in terms of achieve the reading. This kind of reading can be possible only because it exist what we could call "the discourse of the orienting systems pictograms". In any case a rapid reading could be achieved with the former knowledge of the meaning and of the semiotic system. In such case the sole image wouldn't say anything if it is not circumscribed to a discourse and context.

According to Gadamer the *horizon* is what is possible to see from a standing point view. So when a reader approaches a text, it should be at least an indication of the code that has to be used to interpret from that particular approach. The reader will comprehend the code will interpret and will appropriate the text in a process known as the hermeneutical circle. (Gadamer 1976)

In other words, when the reader appropriates the text, is recodifying and configuring a new one from the former. If this statement is true, any image is telling its own story; it has to be reconstructed by the reader with his/her own material.

While identifying the code, the reader is establishing a frame for configuration. Paradoxically, images that belong to more codified systems are carrying more information. I have placed an example of the figure of Christ and the symbol of the fish to exemplify this situation. In the case of advertising, most of the presented images depend on context to be properly read. Those are images that are interpreted due to the space where they are placed. We have seen that sometimes the context is sufficient to realize a proper reading.

The image (Figure 1) only have sense in Montreal and not in other city. The reader must know what is *Accueil Bonneau*, to understand and construct a meaning. The lack of this information will bring to an aberrant reading. *Accueil Bonneau* is an institution that helps homeless people in providing temporary shelter and food; it is a social aid institution that needs funds to survive. The reader must know that, and also should assume that if he/she calls to the given phone number is because he/she is willing to make a contribution. All this is assumed in the context, if the reader doesn't recognize this given-for-granted information, the whole text will not have sense at all.

It is not possible to separate the content from the context, and neither from the code. This situation brings a very open image if it's not placed properly, or a very closed and coded image if placed in a particular time and space.

The author can assure the accuracy of information by the use of a selective code that erases any particular instance that doesn't bring valuable information. That is the case of signage systems, where the pictograms are reduced to very abstract and synthetic rep-

representations that give only needed information to assure understanding. The opposite would be to have a realistic image that can activate different feelings but can avoid to show particular aspects of information. This is the case of image in our example: it is more important the activation of feelings than the information that can be provided.

**Argumentative approach** *Pathos. Ethos*

Clearly addressing to the emotions and Catholic values. The argumentation in this direction is activating a reading that places the feelings of pity and mercy at the front of the reading. This activation seems to be the most important issue in this image. The content and information goes to a second place.

**Mythological System** *Christian Catholic*

The Image is proposing a reading using the symbolic system of the Catholic Tradition. It is needed in terms to reconstruct a proper meaning, to know the basic aspects of this symbolic frame. The Cross, Jesus Christ and the Crucifixion are framing the position from which the reading of the text should be performed

**Textual elements** *DONNEZ.*

This word is in an imperative form. After reading the image, the public is encouraged to donate (money). The narrative of the poster assumes that the image is strong enough to have a counter-argument, then the imperative form of the word implies that the reader doesn't have any other option.

514-845-3906.

Nobody is telling that this is a telephone number but every body is expected to read this numbers as such. There are any instructions explaining what to do but the reader is expected to dial the number to make a donation. It is possible that this is a phone number for information, but is also possible that the public will reach an automated system where direct donations could be done.

*Accueil Bonneau.*

It is assumed by the context that the public will know this institution. The amount of confidence is given for granted, and the sole name will be enough to produce a feeling of confidence.

**Visual elements** *Card-board Cross.*

Symbolic element representing the passion and suffering of Christ it is transferred to a reference of poverty in modern society. The cross is a symbol taken from the Catholic tradition and the cardboard is taken from a symbolic system of modern society where the disposable items are in everyday-life.

*Homeless in crucifixion position.*

It is maybe the most important symbol in this textual configuration it is taking the task to produce the main argument and signification.

**Rhetoric devices** *Metaphor.*

Replacing the position of Jesus Christ by the homeless is the way of establishing the argument. An argument that is directed directly to the feelings and Catholic Values. The metaphor is built upon the substitution of Christ by the homeless: "The homeless is sacrificed as Christ"

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> More about portraits and representation in E. H. Gombrich (1960) *"The mask and the face"* in *Art and Illusion. A Study in the Psychology of Pictorial Representation*, New York- London

<sup>2</sup> Gombrich argues in his essay that the activation quality of the image is by far the most interesting quality of the image because it cannot be imitated by other means. He cites Horace in his *Arte Poética* " *hearing awakes the mind in a slower manner than the eye*"

<sup>3</sup> Different kinds of arguments of *Invention* in Classic Rhetoric. *Ethos* is addressing values and centered in the speaker; *Pathos* is addressing emotions and is centered in the public and *Logos*, is addressing the text and is centered in the discourse. See Meyer, M (1991) *Aristote et les principes de la rhétorique contemporaine*, in *Aristote, la rhétorique*, Paris, Le livre de poche.

<sup>4</sup> Peirce considered the sign to be a system composed by a Representamen, an Object and an Interpretant. See Peirce, C. S. and J. Hoopes (1991). Peirce on signs : writings on semiotic. Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press.

<sup>5</sup> Some of these ideas and parts of the text were presented in the seminar "Cultural Methodologies" directed by Martin Allor at Concordia University (Winter 2003). I judged pertinent to use them to frame the discussion on the use and interpretation of codes.

<sup>6</sup> Term coined by Lotman. See: Lotman, I. U. M. and D. Navarro (1996). La semiosfera. Madrid Valencia, Cátedra ; Universitat de València.

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