

# Peirce, Saussure and Jakobson's Aesthetic Function

Towards a Synthetic View of  
the Aesthetic Function<sup>1</sup>

Irene Portis-Winner  
*Massachusetts College of Art*

## Introduction

Peirce did not have an explicit theory of the aesthetic function nor did Saussure, but the Prague school, and particularly Mukařovský, Jakobson and Bogatyrev did. And for these thinkers the aesthetic function, in its broad and universalizing form as well as in its specific practice, was active not only in individual signs but in larger units that Lotman has dubbed culture texts (cf. Portis-Winner and Winner 1976), only implied by Saussure and Peirce.

Nevertheless, Saussure was the first to call for the study of all signs in culture. Furthermore, in his unpublished *Anagrammes* Saussure did explore the aesthetics of poetic texts which he showed exploited various formal principles that suggest to us devices proffered by Jakobson. Yet Saussure never allowed for the active role of the human subject in the creation of signs: Saussure's system was not triadic as was that of Peirce, and as implicitly was Jakobson's, in spite of the common misunderstanding which sees Jakobson as limiting himself to binarity. For a triadic premise is implied by Jakobson's notion of the multifunctional and polysemic aspects of the text, levels which disappear without the creative and interpreting activity of the human agent. Yet Saussure, in his *Cours*, did not leave us totally adrift. While the human agent, in Saussure's perspective, is primarily a victim of, and determined by, not the creator of, his culture, Saussure's vision was broader. There were suggestions of the non-arbitrary sign even

in the *Cours* and certainly in the *Anagrammes*, where the poetic sign took on new dimensions.

While Peirce neither fully shared the concept of culture (his notions of community, habit and the universe of discourse could be interpreted as applying to the cultural domain), he never slighted the human agent, the foundation of two broad programs fundamental to our exploration of a synthetic view of the aesthetic function. Namely, Peirce's phenomenology based on the three categories and the human sign that activates these categories, and Peirce's inseparable corollaries, the degenerate sign and the repertory of interpretants. Furthermore, while there were not direct analogues to these notions of Peirce in Jakobson's early conceptual system, nevertheless I wish to show that from the beginning these thoughts were not alien to Jakobson's *oeuvre*, and that Jakobson's later works, after he became acquainted with Peirce's writings, reveal some marked convergences in respect to directions and interests as well as clear influences. Indeed, it is thanks to Jakobson that Peirce's ideas were introduced to the social sciences.

I also wish to underline a third principle for Peirce, better called a thematics, where the mode is, in Jakobson's borrowing from Gerald Manley Hopkins, the "artifice", which has a counterpoint in Peirce's logic of semiosis. For excerpts from poetry and sharp metaphors pithily dramatize some of Peirce's most poignant thoughts. Indeed we may see the artifice as a subtext for all three scholars we discuss here. We know that in Jakobson's early life he did write poetry, and Saussure's *Anagrammes* reveal a similar passion. The dynamic function of the poetic principle was also visible in various of Peirce's examples which were often richly metaphoric and frequently included quotations from poetry. In short, whether directly or indirectly expressed, Jakobson and Peirce, and indeed Saussure, shared a fascination with the aesthetic dimension and, in respect to Peirce and Jakobson, an insistence on its articulation within the whole range of human consciousness.

I would go further. I suggest that an exploration of the Jakobson-Peirce dialogue indicates crucial contributions of Peirce's profound insights to fundamental and pioneering views shaping Jakobson's thinking in his American years. As it was first envisaged in the 1929 *Theses of the Prague Linguistic Circle* (Prague Linguistic Circle 1929), the poetic function, identified as one of the diverse functions of language, could not be accommodated within the Saussurean nonfunctional linguistic model (cf. Jakobson's and Tynjanov's seminal paper of 1928 [1972]: 81-83). Furthermore, as

Jakobson elaborated this concept from the mid-sixties on, it was Saussure's later unpublished work on poetics and Peircean semiotics that increasingly took center stage.

### **1. Jakobson's Aesthetic Function in the Milieu of Saussurean and Peircean Perspectives**

Nurtured as Jakobson was in the Russian avant-garde arts, by nature a demanding scientist, but forever testing the boundaries between the domains of science and the arts, inevitably Jakobson would be fascinated by Peirce. It is both the universality and the specificity of the aesthetic function that dominated Jakobson's thinking in various ways all his life. And indirectly Peirce, though never an ethnologist, also found examples of the prevalent aesthetic dimension in the activities of exotic cultures, as witness his fascination with the shaman and the curative power of magic (1.48), as I note later.

Later in the post-war years in the United States, Jakobson specified his key structural principle exploited by the aesthetic function, exemplified in his analyses of poetry but which, he held, had clear implications for all the arts and closely allied forms (including other verbal forms such as prose, fairy tales, myths, jokes, puns, paralingual activities such as gestures, and also the nonverbal arts, particularly the visual arts and music, as well as such syncretic forms as the cinema). Thus, in Jakobson's celebrated six-factor six-function communication model (1960c), he asserted that the projection of the axis of similarity onto the axis of contiguity in the aesthetic dimension of texts had the effect of making every metonymy slightly metaphoric and of giving every metaphor a metonymic tint (Jakobson 1960a: 358-359). While there was no mention of Peirce in this seminal work of Jakobson, we know that Jakobson's engagement with Peirce began at least in the fifties. Clearly this interpenetration of the metaphor and the metonym is, whether by coincidence or design, a kind of Jakobsonian concretization of the Peircean interdependencies of the icon and index. Thus for Jakobson, and indirectly for Peirce, the concatenation of similarities and differences is the basis of the self-focussing aesthetic text that gives rise to new relationships or thirdness.

### 1.1 *The bipolar sign and the artifice*

Jakobson's dialogue with Peirce began early in his American years. For example, in 1952 Jakobson was heralding Peirce's theory of interpretants and insisting that Peirce was the "bold forerunner of structural linguistics" (1952: 565). In 1960, in Jakobson's call for attention to part-whole relations and context in language, he commended Peirce's "perusal of 'blanks'" which he compared to semiotic studies of Frege and Husserl (1960b: 282). Also in 1960 Jakobson asserted that Peirce's legisign, based on conventions established by men, was the essential difference between human and non-human forms of communication. And in 1965, in his "Quest for the Essence of Language", Jakobson continued his lonely crusade, writing:

How many futile and trivial polemics could have been avoided among students of language if they had mastered Peirce's *Speculative Grammar*, and particularly its thesis that 'a genuine symbol is a symbol that has a general meaning' and that this meaning in turn 'can only be a symbol' since '*omne symbolum de simbolo.*' A symbol is not only incapable of indicating any particular thing and necessarily 'denotes a kind of thing' but 'it is itself a kind and not a single thing' for a symbol only signifies through instances of its application through '*replicas*'. (1965: 36). (See 2.301 for these quotations.)

As Jakobson commented later, for Peirce "the word and its meaning are both general rules' 2.292" (1977: 1031). Peirce's insight that only by means of the symbol can we think of the future, says Jakobson, crosses paths with the "vision of Velimir Khlebnikov, the most original poet of our century" (*ibid.*: 37).

Jakobson attempted a synthesis between the Saussurean bipolar sign and Peirce's triad, icon, index and symbol. Jakobson wrote in 1965 that Peirce's division of signs into icons, indices and symbols is "merely a difference in relative hierarchy within individual signs, since in each case one of these factors predominates over the others" (Jakobson 1965: 26), yet he persisted in seeing them as based on a Saussurean dualistic relation between signified and signifier. However, Jakobson's main concern was to revise the concept of the purely arbitrary nature of the relationship between the signifier, for Saussure a mental image, and the signified, for Saussure a concept, which Jakobson supplemented with similarity between signifier and signified in the case of the icon, and contiguity between signifier and signified in the case of the index, leaving arbitrariness solely for the symbol. But, similarity, contiguity and conventionality referred in Peirce's system to

the relation of the whole and undivided sign to the object as interpreted by the interpretant, and therefore the binary signifier/signified relationship could not be successfully superimposed onto Peirce's triad.

In his address in Milan in 1974, Jakobson held that the Stoic tradition, conceiving the sign as a referral of *signans* to *signatum*, was strong in Peirce's doctrine, and reiterated his earlier interpretation of icon, index and symbol (1987: 443). Nevertheless, over this same period his explorations into the semiotics of art led him to a more fecund dialogue with Peirce. Thus in two papers delivered in 1964 on the relation between visual and auditory signs, he borrowed the term "artifice" from Gerald Manley Hopkins and introduced an opposition, factual versus imputed (1987: 466-473), the latter term borrowed from Peirce. For Jakobson described the symbol as "(the) contiguity between the two constituent sides of the symbol that 'may be termed an imputed quality', according to Peirce's felicitous expression of 1867" (1970: 7). And stressing that no verbal signs are wholly conventional but include indexical and iconic aspects, Jakobson referred to the diverse types of semiosis as "a variable relationship between signans and signatum" (1970: 7-8). In 1974 in the opening address in the First International Congress of Semiotics in Milan, Jakobson defined the "artifice".

The signs of a given art can carry the imprint of each of the three semiotic modes described by Peirce: thus they can come near to the symbol, to the icon and to the index, but it is obviously above all in their artistic character that their significance (*semeiosis*) is lodged.

And quoting Hopkins's statement of 1885, "all artifice reduces itself to parallelism. The structure of poetry is that of continuous parallelism" (Jakobson 1987 quoting Hopkins 1959: 84) which is the structural principle of the artifice.

As Jakobson continued,

The 'artifice' is to be added to the triad of semiotic modes established by Peirce. This triad is based on two binary oppositions: contiguous/similar and factual/imputed. The contiguity of the two components of the sign is factual in the *index* but imputed in the *symbol*. Now, the factual similarity which typifies the *icon* finds its logically foreseeable correlative in the imputed similarity which specifies the *artifice*, and it is precisely for this reason that the latter fits into the whole which is now forever a four-part entity of semiotic modes. (Jakobson 1987: 451-2)

Here Jakobson refers to Saussure's unpublished *Anagrammes* to support the principle of parallelism and referral back in the verbal arts. And tying this principle to Peirce, Jakobson writes that in the arts,

This infallible belonging of the two parallels to the same context allows us to complement the system of times which Peirce includes in his semiotic triad: 'An icon has such being as belongs to past experience [...] An index has the being of present experience. The being of a symbol [...] is *esse in futuro*' (IV.447; II.148). The artifice retains the *atemporal* interconnection of the two parallels with their common context. (1987: 452)

In this same address of 1974 Jakobson applies these insights to music and the visual arts (*ibid.*: 453-4). Earlier (1970) Jakobson had already discerned a new component of the aesthetic dimension. Thus he posed the dynamic coexistence of introversive and extroversive semiosis (1970: 12-13). For Jakobson introversive semiosis, which is essentially nonreferential or has an ambiguous relation to reality as opposed to extroversive semiosis, defined a large area of the artistic experience since the *renvoi* is atemporal, referring back to parallelisms and repetitions, thus to equivalences, within the same context. Discussing Stravinsky, Jakobson wrote that, "The code of recognized equivalences between parts and their correlation with the whole is to a great degree a learned, imputed set of parallelisms which are accepted as such in the framework of a given epoch, culture or musical school" (1970: 12). But for Jakobson such equivalences are not purely arbitrary, not simply learned, since they are based on universally perceptible potentialities which eventually become part of the code of art. (See Jakobson's discussion of synesthesia)

By 1977, when Jakobson was calling Peirce a "pathfinder in the science of language", while applauding Peirce's interpretation of dualism and opposition, and quoting Peirce's comment that "'there is an element of twoness in every set (1.446)'" and that "'existence lies in opposition' (1.457)", yet Jakobson's great fascination was with Peirce's thirdness. Thus he describes the interpretant, to which he had called attention much earlier, as the principle of active translation and as transposition from one mode to another. As Jakobson stated, one of Peirce's most brilliant ideas was "his definition of meaning as 'the translation of a sign into another system of signs' (4.457)", adding "I would like to state that the set of interpretants is one of the most ingenious findings and effective devices received from Peirce by semiotics in general and by the linguistic analysis of grammatical and lexical meaning in particular" (Jakobson 1977: 1030).

Jakobson reiterates his early praise of Peirce's symbol as encompassing the idea of invariance behind numerous variants. Furthermore, referring to his admiration of the interpenetrating temporal modes of Peirce's sign clas-

ses, he quotes Peirce's statement that "To say that the future does not influence the present is untenable doctrine' (2.86)". And he underlines Peirce's distinction between efficient causation "whereby the parts compose the whole", and final causation "whereby the whole calls out its parts", and Peirce's conclusion that final causation without efficient causation is "helpless", but efficient without final is worse than helpless, "it is nothing' (1.220)" (Jakobson 1977: 1031).

Thus Jakobson concludes that it is integration of modes that is important, never their isolation. "These divisions [icon-index-symbol] are merely three poles, all of which can coexist within the same sign". And, quoting Peirce, "the most perfect of signs are those in which the iconic, indicative and symbolic characters are blended as equally as possible' (4.448)" (Jakobson 1977: 1031). And, "The value of an icon consists in its exhibiting the features of a state of things regarded as if it were purely imaginary" (4.448; Jakobson 1977: 1032).

### 1.2 *Sound shape and immediate signification*

It is to Jakobson's last great work, with its evocative title, *The Sound Shape of Language* (Jakobson and Waugh 1979), a metaphor he had invoked earlier, that there are the most profound resonances to Peirce's harmonies. In his path-breaking essay of 1960, Jakobson had described Stanislavkij's experiment where changes in the "sound shape" of the same two words conveyed some forty different emotional situations (1960: 345). Reverberating through *The Sound Shape of Language* is the slogan "the poetry of grammar and the grammar of poetry", which became the title of a famed essay (Jakobson 1968) and which may well have been inspired by one of Peirce's particularly dramatic wide-ranging metaphors that I note at the end of this discussion.

The last chapter of the *Sound Shape of Language* that we discuss, entitled "The Spell of Speech Sounds", signals a magic that forever intrigued Jakobson. Here Jakobson returns to his earlier attraction to Russian avant-garde experiments with pure sound in which in fact he participated when, as a young man under the pen name of Aljagrov, he composed poetry within the *zaum* (trans-sense) movement.

As Jakobson held,

There is, however, one kind of verbal activity which is omnipresent and necessarily characterized by the greater or lesser self-determination of speech sounds. This is "poetic language" [...] The notion of verse implies the indispensable presence of a certain specific, *ad hoc* organization of the verbal sound matter. (*ibid.*: 215)

Thus Jakobson asserts the universal coexistence of two poles of language, verse and ordinary prose, and the essential mark of poetry is that "equivalence is promoted to the constitutive device of the sequence" (*ibid.*: 216), an aesthetic principle easily transposed into a Peircean phenomenology where thirdness leads to the conceptualization of new relationships and hence the symbol which in Peirce's terms is never free of "its indices of reaction or icons of qualities" (5.199).

We do not know when Jakobson first became acquainted with the *Anagrammes*, a title which Jakobson implies is inappropriate for Saussure's study of Latin, Greek and Vedic poetry since the work was to cover a very broad range of problems. In this work, Saussure showed, according to Jakobson, that speech sounds are not only "linearly employed as sense-discriminating elements in the service of higher, grammatical units" but are also "invested with their own, plenipotentiary task as verse components" (*ibid.*: 221).

While Jakobson continues to talk of a signifier-signified relation, he casts it as a "dynamized tension", a "direct interplay of the speech sounds with meaning", and heralds Sapir's passion for Hopkins, "particularly for his 'almost terrible *immediacy* of utterance' which is bound with a 'wild joy in the *sheer sound* of words'" (Sapir 1949: 500 quoted by Jakobson and Waugh 1979: 231).

For Jakobson, Saussure's "interest in somnambulant glossolalia" and "his profound passion for the analysis of verse and poetic anagrams" portends the future of poetics; and he quotes Benveniste's observation that had Saussure's manuscripts on anagrams been studied instead of being ignored, "the international struggle for a science of poetics would have received beneficial incentives" (cf. Benveniste 1964: 109-114 cited in Jakobson and Waugh 1979: 221).

Jakobson's final conclusions pull together the import of the materials of the study. Firstly, "Both aspects of language, the ordinary and the poetic, are two copresent and coacting universals familiar to the human being from his first linguistic step". Secondly, in supporting the argument for the autonomy of poetry, never to be reduced to an aberration or anomaly of



language, it is Jakobson's conclusion, documented throughout the study, that poetry "displays its own peculiar sound shape and grammatical structuration [...] In poetry speech sounds spontaneously and immediately display their proper semantic function" (*ibid.*: 223). Jakobson vividly reiterates the later point.

That spell of the 'sheer' sound of words which bursts out in the expressive, sorcerous, and mythopoeic tasks of language, and to the utmost extent in poetry, supplements and counterbalances the specific linguistic device of 'double articulation' and supersedes this disunity by endowing the distinctive features themselves with the power of *immediate* signification. (*ibid.*: 231)

And Jakobson extends this principle to the other arts and allied types of cultural behavior as he proposes that the "*mediate*" way of signification that disappears in the poetic experiments of the early twentieth century parallels "the abstract trend in painting and [is] akin to the magic ingredient in oral tradition" (*ibid.*: 231). Referring to music, Jakobson wrote elsewhere, "What is important in music is not the physically given reality. It is not those tones that are realized, but rather those that *are meant*" (*ibid.*: 456). And, "in music as opposed to language it is the tone system itself that bears the meaning, and this system is indissolubly linked to a world view" (*ibid.*: 457). What Jakobson conveys in these typically cryptic statements referring to the verbal, visual and auditory arts, is that the sign, its sound, its visuality, etc., is empowered with a direct semantic shape or power and, as he notes, in music there are underlying subliminal cultural ingredients basic to "world view", that contribute to this power of immediate signification.

Jakobson's "immediate signification" bears more than a superficial resemblance to Peirce's depiction of processes of semiosis, where the autonomous and nonreductive, yet never independent, role of firstness leads directly to secondness, and inexorably to an uncontrollable rush to the mediating perceptual judgments or thirdness. Central to the thinking of both Jakobson and Peirce was just this link between immediate and mediate. In Jakobson's "Afterword," he returns to his life-long preoccupation with the relation of parts to wholes and the issue of polyfunctionality. He reminds us again that one must never ignore the two differing functions of the distinctive features, "*sense-discriminative* and *sense-determinative*" (Jakobson and Waugh 1979: 234). And "such notional dualisms as competence/performance or innate/acquired prove to be indivisible", while "the

roles of the addressor/addressee in verbal communication are two inseparable topics for investigation". And one must see "the activities of communication and cognition in both their *interpersonal* and their *intrapersonal* aspects" (*ibid.*: 235). And later the dichotomy "absolute rule" as opposed to "an absolutely blind chance" is described as a mere prejudice (*ibid.*: 237), which suggests Peirce's tychism and fallibilism. As Jakobson concludes:

The tension between two structural principles - contiguity and similarity - permeates the whole of language. If [...] distinctive features serve to connect sound and meaning by virtue solely of contiguity, the inner sound symbolism peculiar to these features strives to burst forth and to sustain immediate similarity relation, a kind of *equivalence* (underlining supplied) between the *signans* and the *signatum*. Besides the conventional *thesei* relations, such a direct semantization of the sound shape comes into play. And it is precisely 'play' and the mythopoeic transforms of language which help to dynamize the autonomous semantic potential of the distinctive features and of their complexes. Poetry, as a purposeful, mythopoeic play, is the fullest, universal accomplishment of the synthesis between contiguity and similarity. (*ibid.*: 236)

Here Saussure's signified and signifier are no longer distinct entities related by similarity, contiguity, convention, but have become equivalent. Peirce's iconic indexical symbol and Jakobson's artifice based on "imputed similarity" begin to coalesce.

### 1.3 Jakobson's artifice and Peirce's human sign

A few years before Jakobson named Peirce a "pathfinder in the science of language", he called attention to the little noticed Peircean program of the human sign in all its dimensions, its material and its meaningful levels, which Jakobson said was spontaneously realized by Bogatyrev (who was, wrote Jakobson, an expert in transfiguration) (Jakobson 1976b: 30). We add another concrete link in our chain of Peirce-Jakobson refractions. Two poles - immediacy/mediacy and self-focussing/reflexivity - endow Jakobson's verbal artifice and Peirce's human sign with analogous characteristics.

If we consider immediacy/mediacy, mediacy rules the minimal components or stages of the verbal artifice (its distinctive features) and the human sign (its state of firstness-secondness). In an abstract sense these primacies are simply negations known only through negative differences, the distinctive feature known by the presence-absence of its marked element, and the

human sign by distinction from the other, expressed in ego's initial perception of non-ego which results from the impact of surprise when the expected (premised on ignorance and error) does not occur (5.317), all of which parallels Saussure's signifier and signified based also on negative differences. But Jakobson's sense discriminative function or immediate semantic significance is not in fact absent since neither the artifice nor its components can escape it as we have shown, and for Peirce the human sign cannot control the rush from the qualities and action of firstness and secondness to perceptual judgement or thirdness, the fully semantic level.

We turn to our second link between the artifice and the human sign, the self-focussing/reflexivity pole, which in other terms is the interaction of the aesthetic and metasemiotic functions (which Jakobson called poetic and metalingual in 1960). The human sign, whatever else it signals, must refer back to itself since its primary object is itself, and here it resembles the artifice which, by definition, must direct attention to itself. Considering the intertwining of the aesthetic and metaesthetic functions in the artifice and the human sign, we must emphasize that for Jakobson while metalanguage means talking about the code of language itself, as conceived broadly metalanguage is omnipresent since, as Jakobson stated in 1956, "the interpretation of one linguistic sign through other, in some respect homogeneous signs of the same language, is a metalingual operation" which is "indispensable to learning of language from childhood on and for the creative assimilation of a language" (1976a: 352). Thus the role of Peirce's interpretant becomes in Jakobson's idiom a metalingual operation. It seems obvious that the self-focussing aesthetic sign encourages such a metalingual and creative translation process leading to a reflection on the aesthetic code (or, more broadly, the norms and meaning) itself.

As Jakobson writes, referring to transfiguration permeating the life of all humans as they play out various and even unexpected roles,

This dualism, implemented not only by the artists on stage but by each of us in the diverse social situations we find ourselves in, has been carefully examined by Bogatyrev and this scrutiny may be considered an acute and spontaneous realization of the program launched by Charles Sanders Peirce over a century ago under the slogan 'Man, A Sign'" (5.5 in Jakobson 1976b: 30).

## 2. Peirce and the Aesthetic Function

Here space will allow only the consideration of two focal topics bearing on Peirce's aesthetics, (1) the triadic phenomenology and the human sign; and (2) the degenerate sign — degrees of interpretation.

### 2.1 *Triadism and the human sign*

The equivalent, but not equal, relationship between sign and interpretant is a consequence of the fact that meaning for Peirce always implies a synthesis of three aspects of consciousness. As Peirce wrote,

Not only does Thirdness suppose and involve the ideas of Secondness and Firstness; but never will it be possible to find any Secondness or Firstness in the phenomenon that is not accompanied by Thirdness (5.90).

Thus the keystone of a Peircean aesthetic lies in the organic interrelations of the three categories as they effect the signs representing them. Peirce describes the *phaneron*, his term for “the collective total of all that is in any way or in any sense present to the mind, quite regardless of whether it corresponds to any real thing or not” (1.284).

The idea of First is predominant in the ideas of freshness, life, freedom [...] The first is predominant in feeling, as distinct from objective perception, will and thought [...] the first becomes predominant in the ideas of measureless variety and multiplicity (1:302). [...] among the phanerons there are certain qualities of feeling, such as the color of magenta, the odor of attar, the sound of a railway whistle, the taste of quinine, the quality of emotion upon contemplating a fine mathematical demonstration, the quality of feeling of love, etc [...] (Referring to such a quality) Its only being consists in the fact that there *might be* such a peculiar, positive, suchness in a phaneron. (1:304)

Asking how such feelings of firstness are communicated and whether we can ever enter into one another's feelings, Peirce says he relies on an “instinctive confidence” (1.314) and the evidence of poets since “nothing is truer than true poetry” and in comparison to scientists “artists are much finer and more accurate observers than are scientists” (1.315).

While “the whole content of consciousness is made up of qualities of feelings” (1.317), as Peirce tells us, “the phaneron also contain genuine secondness” (1.320). Since “we live in two worlds, a world of fact (the external world) and a world of fancy (the internal world)” (1.321), there is a “second

category [...] the next simplest feature common to all that comes before the mind, is the element of struggle" which is present even in "such a rudimentary fragment of experience as a simple feeling [...] By struggle [...] I mean mutual action between two things regardless of any sort of third or medium and in particular regardless of any law of action" (1.322). This category introduces resistant fact, experience and the unexpected leading to the double consciousness that is forced upon us when becoming aware of ourselves as other. In becoming aware of the not-self we become aware of ourself. "The idea of other, of *not*, becomes a very pivot of thought" (1.324), all of which is the minimal perception required for the human sign leading to the uncontrollable perceptual judgment. As Peirce wrote,

the Immediate (and therefore in itself unsusceptible of mediation [...]) runs in a continuous stream through our lives; it is the sum total of consciousness whose mediation, which is the continuity of it, is brought about by a real effective force behind consciousness. (5.289)

Thus Peirce's thirdness is a kind of continuity, relating or connecting firstness and secondness through generality ( 1.337).

Synechism for Peirce means there is no absolute discreteness since "elements of thirdness cannot entirely be escaped" ( 7.653). And Continuity means "fluidity, the merging of parts into part" (1.164), "infinity" (1.165), "and continuous expanse" (7.166). Indeed, "Evolution means nothing but *growth* in the wildest sense of that word". (1.173)

For Jakobson such a world view as Peirce's could only be exhilarating. Thus in his "Afterword" to the *Sound Shape of Language* he reiterates his insistent stance: "There is no autonomy without integration and no integration without autonomy" (1979: 234). Similarly, Peirce writes, the categories are not really conceptions but "rather tones or tints upon conceptions" and not in fact separable in the imagination. At best one can suppose one without the other which Peirce calls "*prescission*" but even this is only partial since "The category of first can be prescinded from second and third, and second can be prescinded from third. But second cannot be prescinded from first, nor third from second" (1.353). Hence, following this logic, the passions of secondness which the dyadic connections of differences call forth may return us to a new and heightened appreciation of firstness and all the immediacy that it evokes, and stimulate the abduction of thirdness, that is the cognizing of new similarities signaling the essentially inexhaustible possibilities of new meanings, although the limits are set by the universe of discourse.

Thus elements of thirdness, always tinged with degeneracy, are part of all possible signs, as Jakobson realized when he stated that, “These divisions are merely three poles, all of which can coexist within the same sign” (Jakobson 1977: 1031). For Peirce meaning is grounded in the human sign, the basis of all other signs (Portis-Winner 1989). As Peirce states,

It follows from our own existence (which is proved by the occurrence of ignorance and error) that everything which is present to us is a phenomenal manifestation of ourselves. This does not prevent its being a phenomenon of something without us. (5.283)

This leads to the conclusion that “the word or sign which man uses *is* the man himself” (5.314). Peirce describes the process of perceiving the world in the following way:

The faculties which we must endeavor to gather are three. The first and foremost is that rare faculty, the faculty of seeing what stares one in the face, just as it presents itself, unreplaced by any interpretation, unsophisticated by any allowance for this or that supposed modifying circumstance. This is the faculty of the artist who sees for example the apparent colors of nature as they appear. When the ground is covered by snow on which the sun shines brightly except where shadows fall, if you ask any ordinary man what its color appears to be, he will tell you white, pure white, whiter in the sunlight, a little greyish in the shadow. But that is not what is before his eyes that he is describing; it is his theory of what *ought* to be seen. The artist will tell him that the shadows are not grey but a dull blue and that the snow in the sunshine is of a rich yellow. (5.42)

Secondness is “a resolute discrimination which fastens itself like a bulldog upon the particular feature that we are studying” (5.42). Neither of these two categories is intelligible (5.49), which leads to the third category the generalizing power of the human mind “that comprehends the very essence of the feature under examination purified from all admixture of extraneous and irrelevant accompaniments” (5.42).

However, it is the degenerate sign, hardly sufficiently explored for its implications for aesthetics and yet the keystone to this entire domain for Peirce, which yields a fuller understanding of Peircean “meaning”.

## 2.2 *The degenerate sign — degrees of interpretation*

As we have seen, for Peirce all signs, except the ideal abstract symbol which does not in fact exist in isolation, have degenerate aspects since they are not true triads based on abstract and intrinsic relations of mediation, but

instead are rooted as well in extrinsic relations of similarities and contiguities or real connections to objects. The complex and fascinating concept of the degenerate qualities of signs can only be briefly touched on here. In a general sense, Peirce describes what he means by a degenerate relation:

A Relation is either *Genuine* or *Degenerate*. A Degenerate Relation is a fact concerning a set of objects which consists merely in a partial aspect of the fact that each of the Relates has its Quality. It is a Relation of Qualities such as that A is greater than B. Its relates may be qualities or objects possessing qualities. It may be a Similarity, which is a more Degenerate form, or a Difference, which is a less Degenerate form, or it may be mixed. A Genuine Relation is one which is not necessarily involved in its Relates having any Qualities regardless of each other. Each relate is necessarily individual or self-identical. (2.91)

Among the many complex aspects of Peirce's concept of degeneracy space allows us only to consider two: (1) What is the Ground of the sign which the interpretant interprets which requires a distinction between the Dynamic and the Immediate Object; and (2) What of the various types of interpretants must we distinguish for our project?

We recall that for Peirce the object "is the thing or occasion, however indefinite to which it (the sign) is applied" (5.6). And "The sign stands for something, its *object*. It 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 representation" (2.228). For Peirce there are two kinds of objects. As Eco comments, Peirce (4.536) requires an *immediate* object and a *dynamical* object. The *dynamical* object "by some means contrives to determine the sign to its representation" and the *immediate* object is "the object as the sign itself represents it, and whose Being is thus dependent upon the Representation of it in the Sign" (1976a: 55-56). The relation of these two objects involves the issue of "ground" to which the sign refers "through its object, or the common character of those objects" (2.418 in *ibid.*: 56). Thus Eco holds (*ibid.*: 56), for Peirce a "quality" does not remain mere Firstness, a pure monad, since it becomes something general when we are "reflecting upon it" (4.226 in *ibid.*: 56). Eco states that Peirce saw such an attribute as a universal, an abstraction "in so far as it is caught by the intellect. A quality is a 'general idea' and an 'imputed character' (1.553), it is an *intelligible*. Being a 'general attribute' (1.551), it is among the possible general attributes of the object, the one which has been selected in order to focus on the object *in some respects*" (*ibid.*: 56).

The role of Peirce's "imputed", which refers to the ground of the sign as it represents the Immediate Object, understandably appealed to Jakobson for the artifice. But for Jakobson a dynamic object is not absent since it animates the universally perceptible potentialities of reality, as noted earlier, and it may be argued that such an object is not entirely absent from Saussure's scheme since no matter that Saussure insisted on "flux", he also upheld the possibility of translation, and for him the poetic muse had a secret decodable reality.

Thus it seems that we may associate Peirce's elusive Dynamic Object with the neglected object in Saussure's doctrine and with the latent semiotic nuances which clearly play a part in motivating the artifice. The artifice, then, is not just an internal *renvoi* but also forces us to see reality afresh. We conclude therefore that for Jakobson's artifice, similarity and contiguity incorporate an interplay between the Immediate constructed imputed Object and the ambiguous but not imputed Dynamical Object which the mind or the artist wishes to reinvent and reinvoke over and over. For the aesthetic function we need both of Peirce's objects, and if Jakobson had made this clear many misunderstandings relating to his reconstructions of sign types in Peircean-Saussurean modes might have been avoided.

Peirce's meaning as it bears on an aesthetic function involves kinds of interpretants and their differing kinds of meanings and functions which space does not allow us to elaborate here. Thus we can only recall that Peirce's minimal distinctions of kinds of interpretants are three dimensions, Immediate, Dynamic and Final, but three further phases, "emotional, energetic, and logical" are ascribed in Savan's view (1977-8: 55) to the Dynamic phase. Others have seen these later simply as variants of Immediate, Dynamic and Final, a view rejected by Eco who states that emotional, energetic and logical do not, as some hold, correspond to the three main divisions of interpretants (Eco 1976a: 70).

Savan's description of three purposes of the Final Interpretant are relevant to an aesthetic dimension. The first purpose sets a standard on which to judge the "admirable" (Savan's translation of *kalos*). Thus "Peirce conceived of Aesthetics as the philosophical study of what is intrinsically admirable in qualities, and of the means whereby qualitative excellence [...] may be best achieved" (*ibid.*: 64). Savan adopts Peirce's term *Gratific*<sup>2</sup> for Signs whose Final Interpretant points toward the goal of producing qualities of feeling that are aesthetically admirable and describes Peirce's example of music as a *gratific* sign. "While its emotional Dynamic Interpretant is the



occurrence of specific qualities of feelings, music has an aim or goal which acts like a living force animating the composition of the musical signs and their emotional Dynamic Interpretants. There is a standard of musical excellence by which the music is interpreted as successful or not and by which also the listener's response (the emotional interpretant) is judged and directed (*ibid.*: 64). The second purpose of the Final Interpretant, Savan tells us, is the direction of conduct according to ethical norms. The third and ultimate purpose is to create critical norms or leading principles of logic which produce critical control over habits and beliefs leading to self-criticism (*loc.cit.*).

Comparing the artifice with the proposed *gratific* sign, aesthetic tension, the essence of the artifice engendered by the norm violating behavior of the aesthetic function, is also mobilized in the *gratific* sign. It charges relations not only between the Dynamic and Immediate Objects as conveyed by the sign and between the sign's Dynamic and Final Interpretants, but also between the first purpose and the potential second and third purposes of Final Interpretants. And neither the *artifice* nor the *gratific* sign can be separated from an emotive level as Jakobson's communication model and sound shape of language implies. Both the *gratific* sign and the artifice achieve a self-focussing by exploiting immediacy through devices such as forms of parallelism, etc., thereby expressing admirable qualities. Furthermore, both sign types, being reflexive, potentially mobilize a metasemiotic function. Neither Jakobson's artifice nor Peirce's *gratific* sign remain on a simple expressive level. For both Jakobson and Peirce the aesthetic sign is evolving and purposeful, bearing many kinds of meanings referring to complex contexts from nature to culture. Thus dynamically interrelated functions of sign texts for Jakobson and dynamically interrelated interpretants of signs for Peirce, all of which are oriented toward final goals or purposes that are in fact real but unattainable in their stable perfection, are positions which unite these two disparate and yet affinal thinkers.

We conclude that Jakobson's concrete similarities and differences linked to norms, rules, standard or guiding principles are paralleled in Peirce's degenerate sign ruled by symbolic principles. In Jakobson's aesthetic text the power of introversive semiosis brings about an effect which, like Peirce's aesthetic goodness, brings all the components of the object into new relationships. In Peirce's words:

In the light of the doctrine of categories I should say that an object, to be esthetically good, must have a multitude of parts so related to one another

as to impart a positive simple immediate quality to their totality; and whatever does this is, in so far, esthetically good, no matter what the particular quality of the total may be. If that quality be such as to nauseate us, to scare us, or otherwise to disturb us to the point of throwing us out of the mood of esthetic enjoyment, out of the mood of simply contemplating the embodiment of the quality - just, for example, as the Alps affected the people of old times, when the state of civilization was such that an impression of great power was inseparably associated with lively apprehension and terror - then the object remains none the less esthetically good, although people in our condition are incapacitated from a calm esthetic contemplation of it. (5.132)

Thus there is in fact no such thing as positive grades of aesthetic badness or goodness.

All there will be will be various esthetic qualities; that is, simple qualities of totalities not capable of full embodiment in the parts, which qualities may be more decided and strong in one case than in another. But the very reduction of the intensity may be an esthetic quality: My notion would be that there are innumerable varieties of esthetic quality, but no purely esthetic grade of excellence. (5.132)

A normative science can not simply say what is good or bad, logically, ethically and esthetically or "what degree of goodness a given description of phenomenon attains" since there are different kinds of truth, and in ethics different kinds of qualities of good. Peirce says the following about aesthetics:

As for aesthetics, in that field qualitative differences appear to be so prominent that, abstracted from them, it is impossible to say that there is any appearance which is not esthetically good. Vulgarity and pretension themselves, may appear quite delicious in their perfection, if we once conquer our squeamishness about them, a squeamishness which results from a contemplation of them as possible qualities of our own handiwork - but that is a *moral* and not an *esthetic* way of considering them. (5.128)

Peirce tells us here that aesthetic goodness lies primarily in such a relation of parts to whole that it imparts an immediate quality to the whole that appears "delicious", but that context affects our perception of them. Peirce's relational approach means that the degree to which the disturbance is or is not aesthetic depends both on its intrinsic values and on the interpreter's psychological outlook and his social and cultural milieu.

While for Peirce there is no appearance necessarily free of aesthetic qualities, he did not attempt to analyze intensely the specificities of part-whole relationships that impart his aesthetic goodness, while this was

Jakobson's urgent task leading to a rigorous investigation of the role of symmetries, parallelism, repetitions, sound shapes, and orders of all types. Peirce did point to the "innumerable varieties of aesthetic excellence" referring to part-whole relations of intensity, strength, decidedness etc. And, there are coming to light some disquisitions by Peirce on specifically aesthetic properties of objects which are discussed in the paper by T.G. Winner in this collection. Moreover, in practice Peirce's own writing invite the aesthetic contemplation required for his aesthetic goodness.

We conclude with Peirce's own metaphor of the universe as a representamen, a symbol that is never in fact genuine, even though thirdness for Peirce is mediation and representation *par excellence*. For, as we have seen, there is no symbol which has not its degenerate (that is immediate) aspects as Peirce tells us in his portrait of the universe as a symbol:

The universe is a vast representamen, a great symbol of God's purpose, working out its conclusions in living realities. Now every symbol must have organically attached to it its Indices of Reactions and its Icons of Qualities [...] The universe as an argument is necessarily a great work of art, a great poem - for every fine argument is a poem and a symphony - just as every poem is a sound argument. But let us compare it rather with a painting - with an impressionist seashore piece - then every Quality in a Premiss is one of the elementary colored particles of the Painting: they are all meant to go together to make up the intended Quality that belongs to the whole as whole. That total effect is beyond our ken; but we can appreciate in some measure the resultant Quality of parts of the whole - which Qualities result from the combinations of elementary Qualities that belong to the premises. (5.119)

"The Poetry of Grammar and the Grammar of Poetry", the title of Jakobson's famed essay (1968), evokes this Peircean insight- every great poem is an argument, and every great argument (read grammar) is a poem. Peirce did not equate poetry simply with an excellent argument, just as Jakobson did not equate poetry with the wonders of linguistic grammar. For Peirce and for Jakobson, the fire of metonymic metaphor was as real as, or more real than, the glassy ice of the ultimate truth toward which thirdness strives and never arrives, as thirdness is forever a kind of interrelation of three levels of phenomena, those as sensed, experienced, and as cognized by humans.

**NOTES**

1. This paper was presented in abbreviated form at the Charles S. Peirce Sesquicentennial International Congress at Harvard University. September 5-10, 1989; Session: Peirce and Europe.
2. We should note that references to the term *gratific* are apparently limited. Peirce briefly refers to *gratific* as one kind of sign interpreted by the "Eventual Interpretant" (8.372) and this term also appears in Lieb's account of Peirce's classification of signs as interpreted by the "Explicit Interpretant" (Hardwick 1977: 162).