How to Defend Iconicity with Peirce against Goodman and Bierman and to Open New Issues

Contrary to Bierman (Bierman 1962) and his followers like Goodman (1976) it seems to be indispensable to treat icons as types of signs. Although many iconic signs appear to be partly conventional or indexical, their iconical character is essential for their signification. For example, the meaning of speech accompanying iconic gestures does not seem to depend entirely on convention but on a resemblance between denoted object and gesture.

In my talk I will first sum up Bierman’s and Goodman’s challenge to iconicity. Following their arguments iconicity or resemblance cannot provide the basis for signification.

Secondly, I will show how to defend iconicity against Bierman and Goodman using Peirce’s conception of semiotic and the icon. A solution seems to lie in Peirce’s notion of ground and final interpretant.

Using an example of iconic gestures, I will, thirdly, discuss which further issues have to be solved for a Peircean in the iconicity case. Considering speech accompanying iconic gestures as iconic signs, there are some more problems to solve for a conception of iconic signs. In addition to observing Bierman’s similarity argument, it has to be stated wherein the similarity between an iconic gesture and its object exactly consists and furthermore how the similarity can be noticed.

At first glance there often seems to be no resemblance between a gesture and its denoted object. For example, a gesture in the Bielefeld Speech and Gesture Alignment corpus (Lücking et al., 2010) is only a partial object, badly distorted and does not seem to resemble the denoted object (cf. Rieser, 2010).

One hint for a solution can be found in Peirce’s subdivision of hypoiicons into images, diagrams and metaphors. Diagrams resemble with respect to analogous relations of their parts, so the resemblance between a gesture and an object can consist solely in a relation of their parts. Therefore there are different sorts of resemblances. Nevertheless, there is more to provide, namely the relevant resemblance has to be highlighted for successful signification (cf. Fraassen 2008, p. 17).

So a further question for a Peircean account of semeiosis should be, whether Peirce provides a semantic or pragmatic solution for the highlighting of the relevant properties for iconical signification and what resemblance in his sense exactly is.

References


