

Tango, senses and sensuality

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Abstract

One of the most important contributions of the Peircean paradigm to semiotics consists in its opening the sign to development and modification. Sense, meaning, is no longer a static and fixed property. The Peircean paradigm allows us to wonder about how signs are interpreted, how they make sense in actual reception practices.

The purpose of this paper is to address the problem of the relationship between appropriation practices (Montes, 2011) and significance processes from the analysis of an empirical case, observing how signs of sensuality are produced in the ballroom tango dance.

Tango has earned international reputation mainly as a sensuality dance thanks to its spectacularization and subsequent mediatization. However, as I expect to demonstrate, at the moment of reception, people put those discourses in interaction with specific appropriation practices that shape very special interpretive habits.

I will address the issue from an empirical investigation, especially focused on the production of interpretants (emotional, energetic, and logical), that is to say, looking back to the sign reception from the body to the mind.

From a corpus of 25 focused interviews with people who got to know tango through mass media but that afterwards learnt to dance it as a social dance, it is my intention to show what sensuality means to them today, and how that current practice interacts with other external and previous discourses to produce interpretive habits. Finally, I wish to offer a theoretical reflection about the relationship between these three types of interpretants, their interaction with the discourse of the mass media and the place corporality has in the reception processes.

Keywords

Meaning, Interpretation, Reception, Sensuality, Emotional interpretants

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1. Introduction

Charles Sanders Peirce has been one of the greatest thinkers of our time. His triadic model of the sign allows us to understand the sense production processes in a dynamic way. Meaning, sense, is not considered as a fixed or permanent quality, but as another sign that translates the first one, which is in some way equivalent, and in another way always different, thus opening semiosis to development and modification. But to say that meaning is not fixed does not mean that it is uncertain or, even less so, that it is merely subjective. In the semiosis processes, incorporated interpretive habits (in the most literal sense “body facts”), knowledge, learning, guidelines intervene to make the sense associations that are considered correct for those signs in a particular semiotic community (CP 2.228-1.558-5.265)¹. Hence, the incorporation of the Peircean thought has allowed us to wonder about the reception processes. How are certain signs interpreted? How do sense associations develop, how do they change and how are they modified? How are the interpretive habits that make them possible stabilized? Such questions are unthinkable within other semiotic frameworks, which is why the Peircean model opens new and interesting investigation fields for semiotics².

This article emerges as part of a research I have undertaken from a Peircean and socio-semiotic perspective on the reception of tango by the contemporary *milonguero* public³. *Milongueros* is the term used to refer to those individuals who regularly attend “*milongas*”, places for recreation and socialization, where people meet with the purpose of dancing and listening to tango. There is no need to know each other in order to share a piece since the dance has a complex body language that enables you to dance it even with strangers. This particular type of dance has no preset choreography (unlike stage tango) and its purpose has a strong social component. Social or *milonguero* tango is therefore the dance in which “each couple spontaneously recreates and interprets the dance on the very dance floor, on the basis of a number of steps, movements or figures that are previously known to both dancers, unlike other forms of dance in which a preset choreographic pattern is followed, or fixed beforehand (commonly called stage tango)” (Morel 2011:195). The emphasis in this dance lies heavily on musical interpretation and communication with the fortuitous dance partner.

1 All references to Charles Peirce’s Collected Papers will be introduced with the note “CP” followed by the numbers corresponding to the quoted volume and paragraph, as it is the international usage.

2 In the past decades, in addition, the Peircean paradigm has recovered importance due to the huge coincidences that a lot of thinkers have found between this model and the current cognitive theories. (Lopez Cano, 2005) Hence, the Peircean paradigm, as a semiotic but also epistemological perspective, is capable of functioning as a general framework that makes possible the communication between the learnings of these two historically divorced knowledge fields.

3 Fruit of three years of fieldwork in the city of Cordoba, the second largest city of Argentina, with a qualitative research design that included participant observation and analysis of more than 50 informal interviews, 33 semi-structured interviews and 25 focused interviews (Merton, Fiske & Kendall, 1998).

This general research, of which the current paper is a part, focuses on how this type of tango, born as a cultural phenomenon in the late 19th century, is brought up to date by some of its fans at the height of the 21st century. Thus, the focus of this research is placed on the production of signs in their condition of interpretants as well as in the production of the interpretive habits that make them possible. What sense do *milongueros* find in tango nowadays? and, to what extent can the feelings and emotions that are produced when dancing tango be analyzed as interpretant signs? This last question seems to have an obvious answer: every effect of the sign is its interpretant, including emotional effects (Savan 1991). Nevertheless, as we will see in the following pages, the matter becomes more complex when examining specific empirical cases in depth.

Charles Peirce has been, in this sense, a forefather of the conception of man as a sign, of man in a monistic sense. From a Peircean perspective, semiosis is not limited to conceptual elaboration. The meaning of a sign is not equivalent to a simple mental image, but it includes any effect of the sign which can turn into a new sign. Hence, Peirce opens the way to consider the role of the corporal in semiosis.

It is impossible to think about the meaning of tango without considering the dance. Tango is both music and dance since its creation and has become known worldwide for its dance.

This worldwide recognition is due not only to the Argentinian people who exported it to the old continent during the “mad twenties”, but also, and mainly, to its spreading through mass media.

But the ways to experience this relationship vary according to the place from where the reception occurs: such variations are particularly evident when we shift our attention from stage tango (where the audience listens to the music and watches others dance) to ballroom tango (where the interpreters listen to the music while dancing it).

Whereas in the first case dance and music can merge sounds and images to form a text, a significant unit that produces different sense effects on the receptor, in the second case the listener dances to the music accordingly, so that the dance is an effect of the music and the emotions experienced may be an effect of either the music or the dance, or of the relationship between them. More interestingly, the dancers commit their bodies and senses in quite a different way from those of the people who just listen and watch. Moreover, as I shall attempt to demonstrate, this difference strongly conditions the meanings that are produced by the dance itself. How is sensuality signified in ballroom tango? In order to answer this question, I shall analyze the sense transformation processes produced in a group of *milongueros*, and I will link such transformations to the change in their appropriation practices. In doing so from a Peircean perspective, I shall tackle a theoretical discussion regarding the production of different interpretants (emotional/energetic and logical), from the interpretive habits that make them possible, to the ways in which the relationship between the interpretants should be understood. I will finally propose a hypothesis on the existence of “particularly” emotional signs.

2. The sensuality of tango, a sign (or many).

2.1. Where does it lie?

Tango is a dance that has been associated with sensuality almost since its creation and, towards the early 20th century, it was a dance that scandalized the local aristocracy (Lamas and Binda, 2008; Pujol, 1999). That origin, allegedly reduced to brothels and bawdy houses, with its passionate exoticism (Savigliano, 1995), became the foundation of the imagery that came to nourish much of the narrative of stage tango. This is the tango that has become known worldwide. Therefore, it should be no surprise that the idea of tango dance and its sensuality is commonly identified with the stereotypical image given by stage tango.



Fig. 1. *Scent of a Woman* (1992).



Fig. 2. *True Lies* (1994).

Precisely, tango dance earned worldwide reputation as a sensuality dance thanks to theater shows that during the last four decades went over Usa and Europe⁴, and to its replica in different shows and tv contests, and movies with international importance. Filmography, in general terms, includes from controversial and very famous films such as *Last Tango in Paris* (1972), up to Hollywood films like *Scent of a Woman* (1992) with Al Pacino, *True Lies* (1994) with Arnold Schwarzenegger or *Shall We Dance* (2004) with Richard Gere and Jennifer López, among others.

In spite of the diversity of these productions, all of them, in different ways, feed from the same imaginary of passionate tango where the signs of sensuality are the postures studied in detail, passionate caressing, intertwined and rub-

4 Specially the spectacle *Tango Argentino* of Broadway.



Fig. 3. Flyer of a stage tango show. Male virility, provocative dresses, long slits, and devouring eyes are common topics in the narrative of the sensuality of stage tango.

bing legs which get together, reject each other and graze again, suggestive clothing, devouring eyes, long slits, careful staging of male sexual domination, etc.

Whether this staging widely spread worldwide, mainly through mass media, is an appropriate representation or not of argentine tango is not something we are going to judge in this paper. Our interest is to highlight that this representation has been very efficient to define the elements, the signs, which constitute the sensuality of tango for a lot of people.

In the city of Córdoba, Argentina, neither tango dance nor tango music are characteristic elements of local folklore. Tango was a phenomenon of the popular culture of Río de la Plata region at the beginning and up to the middle of the 20th century, especially of Uruguay and Buenos Aires, but it did not have the same importance in provincial towns of Argentina such as Córdoba, where there is another genre of popular music which is characteristic: the *Cuarteto cordobés*.

Therefore, tango is to a considerable extent a phenomenon indifferent to the current popular culture of Córdoba. Of the interviewees for this research, all of them living in the city of Córdoba, 25 of 33 did not know tango before beginning to take dance lessons, expect for that representation characteristic of stage tango. Moreover, all of them recognized that the idea of tango they had was drastically modified since they started to dance it and to participate in social tango dances called “milongas”⁵. Among the most modified elements

5 Thirty three interviewees with an age range from 22 to 65 years old, 17 men and 16 women, regularly distributed within all ages, all of them with more than two years

since they started to be part of tango dance as protagonists and not only as spectators are the signs of sensuality.

When *milongueros* were asked about where the sensuality of the tango they practice lies, almost unanimously, they answered: “the embrace”.

Interviewer: What was it that drew you to tango?

Lydia (29 years old): Well, the first thing was the proximity. I mean, I had danced salsa, but tango was something else, a different kind of intimacy... The embrace. (...) being so close to someone else... It was, like, too strong for me.

Leonardo (49 years old):- Despite of being a man of liberal views, open minded, it was very hard for me at first to embrace, to give myself in completely. (...) all of a sudden, I found myself in the situation of having to embrace a woman in a very intimate way, willingly, much like a couple, as if she were your wife, your girlfriend, your lover. And these were women of whom I did not even know their names. That was hard, to give myself in. Sure, women with experience in the milonga carry you in that path, helping you to understand that the embrace, reaching this intimacy, not only is part of tango dance, but it's by itself the goal of it.

So it seems that the trick is not so much in those devouring looks, complicated steps or rubbing legs, but in the subtlety of that embrace⁶. It appears again and again in the stories of the *milongueros* linked to a disturbing intimacy and intense sensations. Such embrace is directly related to the contact of the upper torso, and the closeness of faces.

But, what is so special about that embrace? The unanimity in the answer corresponds to an analogous vagueness of its contents. It is extremely significant that when they are asked why, what happens with that embrace, interviewees begin to doubt, and start babbling phrases and never ending sentences. Sensuality is out there, everybody recognizes it, they know where it dwells and how to call it into the game, but none is able to describe it clearly.

In order to understand this, we must first consider that the role of these bodies in motion, in their capacity of significant materiality, transcends the merely visual. These dancing bodies produce sense and are perceived not only in their image but also, and even more, in their tact, their smells, their temperature, sometimes their weight, the pressure exerted on the other's body and space, their sounds and, in many cases, even their perspiration⁷.

dancing tango. With the 25 of them who only knew tango through mass media before beginning to dance it, a focused interview was carried out later and in this occasion they were shown different dance performances as a stimulus for them to express their opinions.

6 This does not mean that there is no influence of other elements. That moment of the embrace is a point in the process of semiosis that under no point of view is the only one involved and is not always, nor necessarily, the creator of sensuality effects.

7 And quite possibly by contagion (Landowski, 2004), that situation where the sense emerges from the sensible perception of the other's presence, and from the identification and empathy produced in such contact.



Fig. 4. I asked a milonguero amateur photographer to choose one photo of his collection to represent the sensuality of tango. He chose this one.

This perception of the body beyond the image has two reasons. Firstly, physical proximity weakens the visual channel while other channels of proxemic and tactile communication are amplified. Secondly, and even more important, the continuous practice of dancing ballroom tango trains the dancers' senses and they become more perceptive to these non-visual, and evidently non-linguistic, signs (talking while dancing is censored). Ballroom tango is a dance where the element of improvisation is very strong. One of the dancers, usually the man, creates while dancing a complex choreography, leading the partner to a series of movements using his body (mainly his torso). This is done step by step, one move at a time, while both of them are listening to the music and trying to interpret it. Communication is completely corporal, forcing the dancers to maintain a strong focus on their bodies, the space and the micro movements of their partner to be able to react in time and in a synchronized way. More than a dance, ballroom tango is a complex corporal communication code to interpret with movements, in couple and embraced, a specific piece of music (Kimmel 2012). Learning how to dance tango involves incorporating this code and training the senses to read the body of one's partner.

This is the reason why body perception plays a decisive role in the emotions that this dance generates. In ballroom tango, signs of sensuality are so subtle and specific that, almost every time, they appear invisible to the outside observer. A perfume, the other's breath hitting one's neck, a subtle increase in the pressure of the chest against each other or of the hand placed behind the back (as fearing the other will get away), a nervous breathing, the trembling hand of the other person when holding one's own or a knowing smile in response to a movement, an embellishment or a footwork. This, in connection with active listening to a particularly emotional type of music.



Figure 5. Flyers promoting a milonga. The embrace is a recurrent topic in this kind of flyers, milongueros know exactly what it means, even if they cannot describe it, and they understand the force behind that compelling image.

2.2. The effect of Sensuality

Following Peirce's proposal, we consider that the meaning of a sign is its direct effect, that caused by the sign. So to be able to figure out what sensuality means, we must look for its specific effects. And these effects cannot be limited to mental images.

Unquestionably, those signs are corporal and their effects are corporal too. But which ones specifically are the effects of sensuality? Although dictionaries do not usually give many clues in order to understand how signs are capable of producing certain senses and not others, to take a look at dictionary definitions may sometimes be a good starting point. Therefore, I propose to go through some definitions of sensual:

SENSUAL: Adj. of or arousing gratification of the senses and physical, especially sexual. (Oxford English Dictionary)⁸

SENSUAL: Adj. perteneciente o relativo a las sensaciones de los sentidos. Se dice de los gustos y deleites de los sentidos, de las cosas que los incitan o satisfacen y de las personas aficionadas a ellos. Perteneciente o relativo al deseo sexual." (DRAE. 22^a Edición)⁹

SENSUEL: Adj. Qui est relatif aux sens. Il signifie aussi Qui flatte les sens. Il se dit aussi des Personnes et signifie Qui est porté, attaché aux plaisirs des sens. (Dictionnaire de l'Académie française 8^a édition)¹⁰

SENSUALE: Agg. Che si riferisce alla soddisfazione dei sensi, spec. nell'ambito sessuale. Che è particolarmente incline ai piaceri, ai godimenti fisici, spec. a quelli del sesso. (Grande dizionario Italiano)¹¹

8 <http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/>

9 <http://lema.rae.es/>

10 <http://atilf.atilf.fr/academie.htm>

11 http://www.grandidizionari.it/dizionario_italiano.aspx



Fig. 6. Signs of sensuality in tango, due to the physical proximity and sensitivity of the dancers, are so subtle that enable a dialogue between two in a place teeming with people. An external observer cannot see or hear what happens between these two people who are sheltered by the intimacy provided by the embrace and that subtle body language.

I believe there are three important elements that are worth revisiting: the idea that we are talking about sensations of the senses (covering, at least potentially, all its plurality); that it is related to sexual desire delights (thus eliminating unpleasant sensations or those linked to other drives), and that this sensuality is a sign defined as such for its capacity to incite, that is to say, to provoke, these sensations. In semiotic terms, we can say that sensual is what causes pleasurable sensations linked to sexual desire, that is to say, emotional and energetic interpretants of sexual pleasure. These are energetic interpretants because, as discussed in further detail below, they supersede the simple affection of the emotional interpretant. These are sensations that require a physical effort (to take control of one's body) and a mental effort (to recognize it as a sexually driven emotion). An energetic interpretant, in terms of the Peircean semiotics theory, is a secondness, a reaction, almost the immediate effect of the sign (CP 5.475). It is the concrete, unique, singular, not necessarily conscious, and almost overwhelming effect caused by the sign.

The first interpretants of sensuality (emotional) can be read in multiple bodily manifestations: in flushed cheeks, a quick reaction to dodge eye contact, rapid pulse, muscle tension, choking voice or the sweat caused by, for example, the closeness of the face of the desired subject. One interviewee, for instance, said that when he first danced with that girl who he had long wanted to dance with, he sweated uncontrollably and disproportionately throughout the

entire performance. Other interviewees used metaphors like “having a lump in my throat”, or reported losing balance (probably by an unusual muscle tension). It is strongly related to emotions¹², producing an effect that shakes the body and makes it go beyond and against its will, betraying it sometimes and telling on it. Here is sensuality, dwelling within the body, lurking about, waiting for that embrace, that closeness of bodies capable of taking it into a frenetic journey through that body where it resides.

Now then, is this effect the result of a habit in Peircean terms? Or, is it a reflection of innate nature, a kind of physiological programming of the organism to react to physical contact with others? Should this be the case, we would have a solely physical effect undistinguishable from the skin lesions caused by the exposure to ultra violet rays, for example. For that to be a sign in Peircean terms, this energetic interpretant must be for a third, in a genuine triadic relation:

But now when a microscopist is in doubt whether a motion of an animalcule is guided by intelligence, of however low an order, the test he always used to apply when I went to school, and I suppose he does so still, is to ascertain whether event, A, produces a second event, B, *as a means* to the production of a third event, C, or not. (CP. 5473) (Original emphasis)

So it is essential to examine whether this secondness is generating a logical interpretant which, as I try to demonstrate below, brings up some interesting dilemmas.

3. A (socio) Semiotic Problem

3.1. Domesticated sensuality

The feelings evoked by this embrace are far from being the result of just the organism’s innate programming, although they may appear so for their eminently physical and involuntary nature. The first confirmation of this stems from the fact that in society we experience many forms of physical contact and transference of interpersonal space that are not read in terms of sexual desire. There are fraternal hugs, hugs from friends, motherly hugs or those given by football teammates, just to name only a few. The world of affectivity and emotions has long been known to be a historical and contingent product (Le Breton, 1998).

We must also bear in mind that from no point of view, the tango embrace, and the intimacy it generates, always and inevitably, operates as a sign of sensuality. Tango is also danced for social and recreational purposes. Many enjoy dancing for fun, with friends, acquaintances or strangers, even with relatives, as a playful practice and not always, nor necessarily, these sensations linked to sexual desire are experienced.

¹² The emotional from the Peircean theory must be understood more as sensations than as feelings (the latter would already imply a logical interpretant).

Such embrace works as a sign of sensuality when the person you are sharing the dance with is capable of turning into an object of desire, even for a fleeting moment. So the closeness brought about by the embrace, and the corporal signs to which these bodies react, interact with other signs settled under the form of beliefs. How does the tango embrace, an embrace that cannot even be that tight since it must allow the dancers to move in a dissociated manner, can become a sensual embrace? The answer lies in the combination of the embrace with at least three imaginaries, three belief systems that together make up precise interpretive habits¹³.

The first one is related to the alleged inherent sensuality of tango. Quite often it is assumed that tango is a sensual dance, even before taking the first dancing lessons and feeling the warmth of that embrace. The habit of interpreting tango as a sensual dance is present before the encounter occurs in the dance, so, as long as that practice does not contradict this belief, it reinforces it. Other discourses dialogue with *milongueros* before turning into such, they shape beliefs and expectations about tango. Then, some will seek the sensuality in the dance and, if they search well enough, some will find it easily in the embrace.

They will find it there because the embrace is capable of bringing into contact this imaginary with another that shapes certain romantic ideals about desirable loving relationships. The embrace is not just experienced as physical contact but also, and even more so, as a medium between two people (not only between bodies). It is the union of two beings who feel each other and connect mutually, or at least so they hope:

Lucas (49 years old): I bought tango for what I was sold regarding its sensuality. And for me, sensuality is two people united. Then, the embrace I practice, the one I enjoy the most is the closed embrace, without alienating women.

Interviewer: What was it that drew you to tango?

Lucy (29 years old): Dancing with somebody. The embrace, that it wasn't a solitary dance...

The sensuality of the tango embrace is built on an imaginary that goes beyond physical contact and the "purely" corporal. Within this framework, the body appears as the frontier through which this coupling occurs not between bodies but between "beings". For this reason, the faces are facing each other, they are close and share the same air, as if by doing so these beings overcome the physical barriers of matter, because body is still ontologically conceived as separate from the being¹⁴. The shared breath is not our own breath (the raw exhalation of our entrails' scent), but one with mint on it. The skin odors perceived are not our own (the ones expected in dancing sweated bodies) but those of deodorants and perfumes. This is precisely so because the intimacy of the embrace maximizes the perception of our senses, touch and smell, so,

13 This list is not exhaustive but merely illustrative.

14 There is extensive literature on the prevalence in our societies of this dualistic concept of mankind, where the body is perceived as accessory to the being, as the cage of the soul, or lower in register to the mind. (Le Breton, 2002).

milongueros take strict care of their bodies for them not to be perceived by those senses as mere bodies.

So, embracing may be sensual, frustrating or even unpleasant. One interviewee told the story that he really wanted to dance with a woman but when he did he was disappointed because her hair smelled dirty. Other *milongueras* (female tango dancers) mentioned that among the things that could turn a dance experience into an unpleasant one were bad breath or feeling his shirt wet.

It all depends on the interaction between what that embrace allows to perceive from the other and a whole series of pre-established beliefs that allow to give value and sense to it, beliefs about tango as a dance of sensuality, about the body and its value as a medium between beings and about the desired romantic relationships, just to name a few. It should be no surprise in our Western societies, where the interpersonal space considered necessary tends to expand and where contact with strangers is avoided, that this occasional contact of bodies is so disturbing. Another particularly important imaginary has to do with the legitimate ways in which men and women interact. The way in which women “follow” and men “lead” may or may not be an addition to this sensuality and construction of the other as the other object of desire. Being an extremely complex imaginary, I will omit to discuss it in further detail this time, suffice to illustrate the following example: Whereas for some men a sensual woman is one who while dancing moves softly and gently because it is a sign of delicacy, for others it is the one who dances more vigorously and with more energy because it involves determination and strength.

However, as I intend to clarify further on, there is something in the relationship between the tango embrace and the sensuality it evokes that cannot be adequately understood only from habits and beliefs.

3.2. *A constitutive impossibility*

The key in Peircean semiosis is that these habits are both condition of possibility and product of semiosis, but how are they produced? In order to answer this, it is important to analyze thoroughly the relationship between that interpretant and the formation of the logical interpretant, the way in which that secondness is *as a means for* a third.

Peirce distinguishes two types of logical interpretants. The first one corresponds to an idea, closely resembling a concept; it is the result of that effort represented by the second. But this is an imperfect logical interpretant because, ultimately, it is nothing but another sign that in turn has its interpretants. The second type is the final logical interpretant (CP 5.475, 5.476, 5.491), the habit itself built on the belief discussed in previous paragraphs, but for its production it seems necessary to go through the logical interpretant (imperfect) that equates to a mental idea, a conjecture, a concept.

In the next step of thought, those first logical interpretants stimulate us to various voluntary performances in the inner world. We imagine ourselves in various situations and animated by various motives; and we proceed to trace out the alternative lines of conduct which the conjectures would leave open to us. (CP 5481)

However, in our case, we find very few clear conceptual references, or really satisfactory descriptions, regarding that experienced sensuality, even less so, conjectures with this level of rationality. Most interviewees could barely stammer some “conjectures”, usually circular or tautological. When asked why the embrace was the most sensual element in tango, some of the answers were: “because the embrace ... that’s it, that is tango, because tango is the embrace” or “the embrace, well, I don’t know, the closeness, the connection with the other”. In conceptual terms the embrace appears to those who dance tango as an indefinable sign (of indescribable effects too). And even if we make the effort to define, for them, the contents of that sensuality (either from dictionary, semantic definitions, or through dense socio-semiotic descriptions), there is still one more problem to be solved:

If this logical interpretant (the general concept, the mental idea) is the translation of the sign of which it is its interpretant (the embrace in ballroom tango), it should then be able to produce equivalent emotional and energetic interpretants by itself and, evidently, this is quite difficult to accomplish. The concrete physical and psychological affections evoked by the dance of tango in its embrace cannot be induced by a concept or general idea of what sensuality is. Perhaps the mental image, the recollection of such an experience can cause similar sensations, but hardly comparable in intensity to the sensitive, singular, experience. Otherwise, in order to experience those emotions, those interpretants, it would be enough to read a book on the sensuality in tango (and the reader of this article would probably feel sufficiently moved), instead of making the effort to dance.

Precisely because of this not being so, *milongueros* dance tango instead of just talking about it and are particularly affected by the sensitive experience. There is something regarding the corporal perception which is impossible to grasp by the conjecture¹⁵. There is a lot of that experience hiding even from ourselves, reluctant to be described, which imposes clear limits to our ability to think of it in reasoned terms. It can be inferred, then, that there has to be something in that embrace, in the perception of the other to the beat of a suffering music, which makes it particularly suitable to provoke that sensuality that cannot be replicated by a logical interpretant. Nevertheless, not all signs achieve the required development stage to cause a logical interpretant in these terms and Peirce himself acknowledges it (CP 5.482-5.489). It is unclear, however, how they can generate a final logical interpretant, as he puts it himself, without going through the development from the first logical or conjectural interpretant. The controversy is served.

Based on this work, I believe that it is convenient to understand the logical interpretant as the translation, not always necessary, of the emotional and energetic interpretants as it is an effect of them. To consider it as such allows us to think of the transformation from one to the other as a relation of equivalence, with the usual losses and additions involved in any translation (Eco 2003). Thinking about the relationship between interpretants in this

15 In this regard, there are a lot of works that support this same idea from different approaches and traditions. I believe those of Patrizia Violi (2001), Paolo Fabbri (1998) and Eric Landowski (2004) are irreplaceable models among them.

way supposes to equate them in some aspects while differentiating them in others.

And the differences between them is, in this case, crucial to understand why the interpretive habit that gives sense to the sensuality of tango radically changed since these people began to dance tango.

4. Where is mass-media power left?

Signs do not have fixed meanings; they change, transform, adapt to times, communicational circumstances and cultures (and subcultures too).

In our case, 25 people who originally recognized the sensuality of tango showed in those stereotypical images of stage tango produced a change in their beliefs, a modification in the habit, and redirected the sensuality of tango to new signs.

But, what happened with what they believed until then? In some cases, they broaden what the sensuality of tango meant, including those stage tango signs as a different type of signs of sensuality, less authentic than the sensuality of the embrace, but valid (to a lesser extent), while in other cases they replaced those signs for others and qualified that representation as false and artificial.

Thereon, the reception of such same representations of stage tango which would have been judged as adequate before was also modified. When observing videos of different performances of tango¹⁶, those with evident caresses, erotic postures or staging of sexual domination were clearly marked as less representative of the sensuality of tango than those where the sexual tension was gathered in the contact of torsos and faces. Some of them even mocked of that “overacting” and spontaneously mentioned the overacting in the films “True Lies” or “Shall We Dance” as examples of false representations of the sensuality of tango.

Does this mean that the discourses of mass media lack of power to install sense associations? The answer is no.

It simply means that those discourses influenced by mass media, globally spread, converse with other discourses and with other experiences settle under the form of beliefs, and that for that reason not always the sense effects they get are the expected ones. The semiosis, as Peirce knew well, is impossible to close down.

In addition, it is possible that mass media discourses about tango dance are not completely exempt of the responsibility of spreading the beliefs that make possible for the tango embrace to be the holder of sensuality. Although these narrations of mass media put this sensuality in other signs, they contribute to strengthen the imaginary according to which tango dance would be sensual by essence, even more than rock&roll, waltz or other popular dances. It is feasible to disagree with which ones the signs of sensuality are, while agreeing on its unquestionable existence.

The criteria about the characteristics that the other’s body must fulfill to be able to turn into the support of that sexual desire (which scents are pleasant,

16 Three videos of stage tango and four videos of ballroom tango.

for example, among many other appreciations), are based on beliefs that mass media discourses constantly produced and/or reinforced.

And it is certainly possible that such mass media discourses contribute also to strengthen the imaginary of the romantic heterosexual couple that, as we mentioned before, is one of the assumptions that makes possible for tango embrace to work as a sign of sensuality.

So that, although in this case the power of mass media messages appears “filtered” by other beliefs and senses that come from the experience and the practice of the dance, that does not mean that they are not effective to establish or strengthen other beliefs intimately related.

Peirce argued with Descartes and stated that men were full of beliefs and not of doubts, that any sense production was always based on beliefs. Hence, to understand a sign involves carrying back to the group of beliefs on which it is based and over which mass media plays an important role.

The practice of tango dance has modified only a part of the beliefs involved in the sensuality of tango, the one that has to do with which is the support of that sense, which is its representamen, but not the beliefs required by that sign to work as such.

5. Conclusions. Senses, appropriation practices and mutations

What makes a person modify an established habit?

In our case, the practice of the dance gave them new sensible experiences and put them in contact with other discourses and with other opinions about what the authentic sensuality of tango is. That forced a revision of their beliefs and a modification in the interpretive habits. Little by little, and without becoming necessarily aware of it, what was a sign of sensuality was changing.

Now, what becomes extremely stimulating as a question is why the modification of this habit is produced. Why these people believed during almost their whole lives that the sensuality of tango lay in the postures, clothing and gestures spread by stage tango, through films and tv programs, until they experienced the practice of the dance and had contact with other discourses typical of the *milonguero* environment. The latter was capable of modifying that belief in much less time and in a highly efficient way: In just a couple of years, a belief forged in the heat of mass media discourses during a whole life was subverted.

Why was this embrace able to replace the media image?

Among the reasons of this success of the embrace over the image, we can without a doubt think of the frequency and persistence of the contact with these discourses, which conceive the sensuality of tango in another way.

Certainly, since these *milongueros* started to take tango lessons, tango dance turned into an important part of their lives. They started to regularly attend classes, seminars, dances, and to form friendships with other *milongueros*. Tango dance began to be much present in their lives and all of them had contact with the *milonguero* environment at least twice a week, what did not happen before starting to dance it. Before learning to dance, they may have occasionally watched a film where tango was danced, or a dance show on tv. This is not, without a doubt, a minor fact.

But there is something more that favors the success of the embrace over the image as a sign of sensuality and it is that it is more appropriate to give sense to a new sensible experience.

Peirce, as a good pragmatist, held that beliefs were not revised until reality, the object, forced their revision, until they failed to give sense to the concrete experience (CP 5.370). So, we have reasons to think that something in the concrete experience of these *milongueros* forced the revision of the belief and this is the effective experience of the sexual tension experienced during the dance. The intensity of the experience of that sexual tension during the practice of the dance is much greater than the one that can be generated by the display of a stage tango performance. Those signs seem to adapt better to the object.

All signs produce emotional interpretants. The affecting of the being is the condition of the acknowledgment of the sign as such even when it is still unknown sign of what thing is.

If we are sleeping and a strange sound from outside our house awakens us, that sign has affected us, has produced an emotional interpretant before distinguishing if it is a thief or an animal in the backyard. And that impulse to recognize the source of that noise, to give it a sense, is the energetic interpretant. If the logic interpretant may not be, or may be incomplete, the emotional interpretant is a necessary condition of any semiotic process; it is its firstness, its potential, mere quality (CP 1.25 - 6.198).

But I believe, from this research, that some signs, due to the specific features of their object, would be “particularly” emotional. That is to say, the affecting of the being can be more developed than its symbolization.

The tango embrace ignites passions where words fade away, because the shudder of the being is proportional to the frustration of failing to make sense (logical rational) of that corporal-based experience. Its magic lies on the fact that when the uncontrollable and inexplicable “lump in my throat” effect appears, the excitement intensifies. That intractability with the logical interpretant is its nature and fuel.

In this type of signs, the emotional interpretant is much more developed than in other signs. These are the signs of the emotions. The affecting of the being (in body and soul) demanded by the signs of sensuality, of fear, of sadness, of pain, and of a lot more of the same type is not equivalent to the one demanded by the acknowledgment of a sign of transition. These signs affect us with a different intensity and urgency, and this is what defines them.

The more fear a sign of fear is able to cause, the more it makes us tremble, the better sign is.

These “particularly” emotional objects find in the signs that involve the perception from multiple senses and especially that involve the concrete experience, a much more appropriate translation. There would be something, I dare to think, in the materiality of these signs that would make them more appropriate to these objects.

For this reason, the personal, tactile, sensible experience of another person’s body with its sounds, its breath and its smells, prevails over the optical perception of those other bodies that offer the images of the theater, the films and the tv.

All this should draw the attention to the place of sensible and corporal experiences in semiotics, even in societies highly influenced by mass media like ours. The relationship between these different sense production systems is complex and dialectical.

The Peircean semiotics, in this sense, appears as an invaluable tool to consider the participation of the corporal in semiosis, because his conception of the subject is monistic, but also because his notion of the sense as pure effect of the sign allows us to think the meaning beyond mental images or linguistic determinations.

This makes possible to address issues like the one I have intended to expound in this article: How some meanings change, or why some signs prevail over others when invoking the sensuality of tango.

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