

## RESEÑAS

ALIN OLTENAU

*Philosophy of Education in the Semiotics of Charles Peirce.*

*A Cosmology of Learning and Loving*

Peter Lang: 2015, 282 pages.

ISBN 978-3-03- 431882-2

An innovative theory of learning that finds its foundations in the evolutionary semiotics of Charles Peirce is described and explained in this book. The author advances his PhD thesis, adding to it a more personal input without abandoning the thoroughness of the academia. *Philosophy of Education in the Semiotics of Charles Peirce* pertains to the realm of Edusemiotics, an emergent field that merges Philosophy, Education and Semiotics.

Edusemiotics is an integrative field of study that finds its roots in the theory of signs of Charles Peirce, and additionally, it is grounded on the philosophy of education. This emerging transdisciplinary domain takes the sign of Peirce – the triadic relation - as the main unit of analysis from where theories on education can be developed and enriched. Thus, the semiotic view of education leads us to see learning and teaching from the pragmatic perspective of Peirce, and to approach it under his terminology of signification. It is noteworthy that this perspective of signs and signification phenomena is not constrained to linguistics or to any discipline. It is a cosmological approach to signs, that goes from the universe to the existence, where every experience and the mere experience of being is permeated with the process of semiosis. Starting from these general ideas, the present monograph provides a teleological semiotic view of education; developing in this manner, a theory of learning that approaches education in terms of signification phenomena. Most importantly, what this work argues is that significant learning can only occur as a manifestation of love, and therefore, solely within an environment of freedom. The author supports his main argument following Peirce's science of signs, explaining throughout his book that "learning-education-research continuity is an embodiment of signification that reflects its underpinning principles of cosmological and biological evolution" (p.1).

This book, in general terms, provides an exhaustive theoretical ground to support Peirce theory of learning as an acceptable and appropriate conceptual framework for education. It is a holistic approach that, first of all, places the theory of signs as the cornerstone for understanding learning and teaching as processes of semiosis that go in hand with a cosmological evolution:

"Learning is the Universe's method of discovering itself. Being spread from a self to another, learning is enhanced. Teaching is this particular case of learning where the learning of a non-self is at stake thus, teaching has proved valuable for living beings as an enhancement of learning" (p.144)

For Peirce, there are three principles that are active in the universe and are essential for the emergence of semiosis: chance, necessity and love, being the latter the one that permits the transcendence from chance and necessity. An important argument is that, for him, signification is fulfilled with love, idea that follows the doctrine of agapism (evolution by the principle of love), and therefore, a person's learning should be the result of a free choice, as freedom is the main characteristic of love, and ultimately the true condition for growth. The author, then, understands learning as a "free discovery" (p.8) of similarities that are grounded on iconicity and that should not follow a non-liberal curriculum that sees teaching as instruction. Unlikely

other mainstream approaches to education, this philosophical theory of learning highlights the connection between love and learning, teacher and student and signs and life. From a mereological perspective, these entities are seen as constituents that interact between each other, the connections they display being fundamental. Then, they aren't considered as static entities but actually they appear to be continuously evolving by their-own and as a whole that includes all of them. (to). Thus, the relation between student and teacher can be seen as an inter-personal relation, a cooperation of signs, a semiosis where the phenomena of signification can only be given by the desire to learn, share and merge with others.

This monograph consists of three parts with a total of ten chapters, being five in the first, four in the second, and two in the last part. First of all, part one provides a thorough theoretical background concerning Peirce's Theory of Learning. There, epistemological bases of this theory, its place within philosophy, the sharing components of semiotics and education and, finally, the main concepts of the theory of signs in conjunction with its typology are explained. In part two, the author develops the main arguments of the Theory of Learning and approaches education considering Peirce's theory of evolution. Throughout the chapters he defines the role of Icon, specifically how it changes and evolves into Argument, and the three phenomenological categories developed by Peirce: Tychasm, the evolution by chance; Anacasm, the evolution by necessity; and most importantly, Agapasm, the evolution by love. Finally, in part three, it is discussed how the author advances a theory of learning grounded in the semiotics of Peirce, contrasting and comparing it with other schools and philosophical approaches to education. Additionally, in this section the objections this approach could generate are treated. Conclusively, the aim of these chapters is to describe and explain how Peirce's Theory of Learning proves to be a valuable conceptual framework for education.

At a glance, what Olteanu presents in his monograph is an innovative approach to education that at times seems controversial. For ages, education has found its foundations in a system ruled by dualism, where there are hierarchies, relations of power and different kinds of dichotomies. Furthermore, instructionalism has been the main method to teach children, young people, and adults. This method is a psychological approach that focuses on the content rather than on the teacher-student interpersonal relationships. The teacher draws the attention to what to learn, not to the place where it occurs; imposing consciously or unconsciously a rigid curriculum where there is not much liberty for discovery and nor space for cultivating student-teacher relationships. In this manner, what is prompted is an indexical education that points out what to learn, what to see, or what to think; leaving aside, at times, the possibility for discovery and the creation of meaningful interpersonal relations. It is in this point when this approach gets controversial, as its main argument is the implementation of a theory that grounds learning in an agapic (love) personal relationship between the teacher and student, where in order to reach learning it is necessary a symmetrical relationship, a continuum between both, that ultimately leads to real learning:

“Learning properly happens when the consciousness of the teacher and that of the student are coextensive, perfectly continuous, without any interruptions, so that an Interpretant consciousness can occur. Two self realities evoke a third self reality- this is where learning begins. This means that the two are in a relation” (p. 153)

Teacher and student are in a supra-subjective relation, in a sign-relation, where, in order to reach the desired learning, the two selves evolve by means of the non-self, losing the proper self to fuse into another's. This sign-relation consists of a three termini of relations where, synthetically explained, “a sign is something, A, which denotes some fact or object, B, to some interpretant thought, C” (p.24). Also, these three termini can be defined in terms of firstness, secondness or thirdness or being denominated as a Representamen, Object or Interpretant

respectively. This triadic relation is constant in the theory of learning, functioning as principles applicable to several aspects of universe and life. Although I have only mentioned the most elemental concepts of the typology of Peirce, within the book it is provided an impeccable explanation of the many trichotomies that these three principles give rise to, especially of the Icon-Index-Symbol and Rheme-Dicisign-Argument trichotomies. How they relate is crucial for the main argument of the author, as he declares that learning is the result of a transcendence of signification that goes from the Icon to the Argument, which at the same time is only possible by the semiotic relation of a student and teacher. What is important to bear in mind is that these triads only find their meaning in their relations, and for the same reason the author establishes that teaching and learning and the relation between student and teacher must be grounded in the sign-relation; conceiving, thus, education as a semiotic structure. Then, the relation teacher-student or student-teacher should be seen as relations of cooperation since learning, just as the sign, is the result of the cooperation between Representamen, Object, and Interpretant.

Thus, Peirce's Theory of Learning developed by Olteanu approaches life, learning and knowledge as evolving signs and, as signs, they can solely exist in relations, and *in actu*. Learning means to integrate new meanings into the self, and when that happens, the self redefines itself in relation to these new webs of significations, the *Umwelt* and *Lebenwelt* adapt and evolve in conjunction with the self and the new signs, and ultimately "this expansion of the self towards a new interpretant is the evolution of life". (p.74). The semiotic philosophy of education, then, not only offers an ontological perspective of learning and a phenomenological approach to signification, but also provides a teleological and cosmological perspective of them, as both the universe and world evolve through signs, and learning is a semiotic result of evolution (p.25). Conclusively, what is mainly claimed in this monograph is that student and teacher should cultivate an agapic connection instead of an asymmetrical and impersonal relation. For the author, learning is a process of discovery which can only occur in an environment, *Umwelt*, characterized by freedom: and only love is defined by freedom. Love "is the only principle of growth" (p. 269) and therefore is the only principle that leads to the transcendence of signification and evolution.

This monograph gives an excellent description and explanation of the theory of signs of Charles Peirce, and the manner in which it is extended and applied to the sphere of education is equally remarkable. In order to fully comprehend the main arguments made by the author, it is necessary to understand the concepts developed by Peirce in his theory of signs and how they relate to phenomenology. Although the book provides a very complete and clear background concerning the epistemological theoretical aspect related to the Theory of Learning, from my point of view, having a solid theoretical background in philosophy would facilitate the reading, and probably would ensure the readers a more enlightening experience at the moment of reading it. Nonetheless, this does not mean that its main audience should be philosophers. This work can be appreciated by any person, professional or academic whose interests are in semiotics, pedagogy, philosophy, linguistics or beyond. Certainly, Alin Olteanu with his book not only made a contribution to the emergent field of Edusemiotics but also offered a more evolved conception of teaching, learning and loving.

MARÍA INÉS QUILODRÁN  
 Universidad de Chile  
 Maria\_inesqj@yahoo.com