

Semiotics of affect in consumer rituals: sensations, feelings, and emotions

Semiótica dos afetos nos rituais de consumo: sensações, sentimentos e emoções

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ABSTRACT

This study describes the results of theoretical research on the conceptual connections between sensations, feelings, and emotions based on a Peircean semiotic perspective according to the universal categories of experience firstness, secondness, and thirdness, in articulation with the anthropology of affections, the main exponent being Le Breton and psychoanalysis. By understanding consumption as a ritual and its links with identity, citizenship, and as an act of love, we find its capacity to produce sensitive stimuli, promote pleasant feelings, and generate emotions that promote immediate satisfaction fueled by advertising, the privileged language of consumption and brands.

Keywords: Semiotics of affect, consumer rituals, sensations, feelings, emotions

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RESUMO

O texto apresenta os resultados de pesquisa teórica sobre as conexões conceituais entre sensações, sentimentos e emoções, em uma perspectiva semiótica peirciana, fundada nas categorias universais da experiência Primeiridade, Secundidade e Terceiridade, em articulação com a antropologia dos afetos, sendo o principal expoente Le Breton e a psicanálise. A partir do entendimento do consumo como ritual e nas suas articulações com identidade, cidadania e como ato de amor, compreendemos sua capacidade de produzir estímulos sensíveis, promover sentimentos aprazíveis e gerar emoções promotoras de satisfação imediata alimentada pela publicidade, linguagem privilegiada do consumo e das marcas.

Palavras-chave: Semiótica dos afetos, rituais de consumo, sensações, sentimentos, emoções



EMOTIONS AND AFFECTIONS are at the focus of discussion in the Humanities and Social Sciences, and certainly in Semiotics, both that founded in Philosophy and that which develops from Languages and Linguistics. This can be seen in Charles Sanders Peirce (1988, 1995) both in the notion of Firstness as a category of thought and experience, and in the unease caused by doubt as an emotional force that guides us towards understanding and the establishment of belief, primarily in cases of its constitution through the scientific method (Perez, 2023), as well as in the Semiotics of the Passions by Algirdas Julien Greimas and Jacques Fontanille (1994, p. 22): “O sentir se dá como um modo de ser que existe enquanto tal, antes de qualquer impressão ou graças a eliminação de toda a racionalidade. Situar a paixão para além do surgimento da significação . . .”¹. Also present in the research of Eric Landowski and José Luiz Fiorin (1997), which resulted in the work *O gosto da gente, o gosto das coisas* [The taste of things]; in the semiotic reflections on cinema and affections in *O sentido das paixões* [The meaning of passions] by Hermes Leal (2023); in the work *Do inteligível ao sensível* [Between the sensible and the intelligible], edited by Ana Claudia de Oliveira and Eric Landowski (1995); and in Umberto Eco’s classic works *History of Beauty* (2004) and *History of Ugliness* (2007) with their emotional unfolding of adherence and repulsion, and so many other studies and publications that are a reference for the semiotic discussion that is taking place here.

¹On the original: “El sentir se dá de entrada como un modo de ser que existe de suyo, con anterioridad a toda impresión o gracias a la eliminación de toda racionalidade... Situar la pasión en un más allá del surgimiento de la significación . . .”

We can understand affection in a first dimension that leads us to understand the interaction between a stimulus and a body, therefore, an event that touches us—stimulates our senses and thus produces physical reactions, but also feelings—which underpin emotions. To study affect is also to seek an understanding of sensations and feelings as symbolic phenomena, therefore phenomena of language, which underlie and sustain emotions of a different nature. It means talking about human passions, love, but also hatred and indifference, in order to bring an affiliation to the psychoanalysis of Freud (1968, 2017) and his readers Cesarotto (2012) and Montoto (2012) who follow in the continuity of psychoanalytic work, and the semiosis triggered by language and the relationships between ways of life and the socio-cultural and consumer world, therefore also an area of interface with Anthropology and Sociology, not to mention that Philosophy and the Arts have had an important field of reflection and action on emotions since their remote origins.

Although the complexity of the object of investigation demands a multidisciplinary approach, we have opted at this point to explore the theme of affections by integrating the theoretical precepts of Peirce’s semiotics (1988, 1995), further elaborated by Ibri (2008, 2015, 2020), in dialogue with the anthropological

perspective, with an emphasis on Le Breton's reflections (2007, 2013 and 2016), to constitute the conceptual foundation on sensations, feelings and emotions. A brief approach to psychoanalysis will ensure a connection with the concept of the unconscious and desire, the basis of the search for completeness, in line with Freud (1968, 2011), Montoto (2012), Cesarotto (2012), Girard (2011) and Cesarotto and Perez (2023). We will continue with reflections on consumption, analyzing its conceptual foundations with emphasis on Douglas and Isherwood (2004), Miller (2002), Campbell (2001), McCracken (2003), García Canclini (2010), André (2006), Taschner (2009), Barbosa and Campbell (2006) and Perez (2003, 2016, 2020); the theoretical contributions to advertising language, persuasion and mechanisms for managing emotions are focused on Rocha's contributions (1995), Carvalho (1998), Vestergaard and Torben (1988), Lindstrom (2005), Gobé (2002), Lipovetsky (2017, 2020), Perez (2016, 2020), Perez and Trindade (2019), Pompeu (2021, 2024), Pompeu and Sato (2024).

SENSATION, FEELING AND EMOTION: MULTIPLE PERSPECTIVES

We will start from the theoretical framework of Charles Sanders Peirce's semiotics to understand human sensations, feelings and emotions and their unfolding in language and, subsequently, in consumption. In Peircean Phenomenology, we find an understanding of the universal classes that support all human experience, represented by the three categories Firstness, Secondness and Thirdness (Ibri, 2015, p. 23), sensation is an intuitive and introverted phenomenon. It is primarily an event on the physical and/or psychic level. This understanding is evident in the understanding of sensation as Firstness, as it can be considered an immediate quality that is an invisible, non-tangible impression, therefore very fragile in descriptive power, being only felt. Sensation as a quality is thus what gives our immediate consciousness its flavor, aroma, tone and hue, what is hidden from our thought, but is acting. The quality of consciousness, in its immediacy, is so tender that we can hardly touch it without spoiling it (Peirce, 1988). Firstness has the nature of an interiority which is not reduced to the subjective world, but it also involves the physical dimension. The concept of Firstness emerges as a philosophical category, a way of freely appearing phenomena that is characterized "by the experience of unity between subject and object" (Ibri, 2008, p. 229) and more is the experience of quality exactly as it presents itself: "It requires a poetic way of looking, without mediations" (Ibri, 2015, p.32). Thus, there is a fusion between the qualities that constitute the objects and the interiority of those who experience them. This is why we see a kind of residue of the phenomenal world, something not contemplated by

language in its everyday expression, something that is disregarded by it because it is unfamiliar with its own structure and scope: language always looks for what can be given a name (2020, p. 108). But, as Ibri (2008, p. 232) states, “names require sharing and what is first participates in nothing but itself”, pure quality.

On a psychic level, sensation is imaginary, as it is associated with an action/reaction produced only by the mind. On a physical level, it is directly associated with the five senses: smell, taste, sight, touch and hearing, and their overlapping receptors of the world’s stimuli. We note that sensation is a concept that carries a great semiotic-philosophical tradition associated with affective states that have corporeality as their origin, which leads us to search for an understanding of feelings, a kind of responsive consequence of what has affected us.

Feeling can be defined as an affective state or affective tendency in general, different from knowledge, the realm of Thirdness. Feeling, therefore, is a real source of emotions, based on pain, anguish or pleasure that have cultural and moral causes and not immediate organic causes, even though the body is the channel. In the case of feeling, the great tradition is associated with reflection, beliefs and the moral life. In Peirce’s view, feeling is at the level of Firstness and Secondness, because feeling is both situated in the ambit of immediacy, therefore Firstness, still at a stage where we don’t reflect on what we feel, but we already feel it; and from the moment we begin to reflect on what we feel, we create an introductory understanding of what is happening—Secondness—, since the phenomenon is in our mind and we can verify the beginnings of the physical effects on the body. Which is why Peirce (1988, p. 165-165) refers to it as a reaction, existence, event or even the experience of a perception. Peirce (CP 1.306 and CP 1.307) is precise in his understanding:

By a feeling I mean an example of that kind of consciousness which does not involve any analysis... A feeling is not an event . . . It is a state, which is so in its totality, in every moment of time and to the extent that it lasts.

This dimension of a totally present temporality is emphasized by Ibri (2015, p.31):

It is what Peirce calls suchness, because it, as a quality, is as it is and nothing else. Excluding the aspects of factuality of the past and intentionality for a future, the logical form of this state of consciousness is mere possibility.

If sensations are first and feelings second, emotions are of the order of thirdness. A kind of reaction to secondness, mediation. As Peirce (1988, p.

168) puts it: “It brings information to mind, determines the idea and gives it body”. The first sign, determined by the dynamic object (second) is interpreted, generating an emotional performer (third), which in our analysis is a logical place for emotion. Peircian phenomenology makes us understand that Thirdness uses elongated time, presenting itself as an instance of mediation between the lived past (encapsulation of Firstness with Secondness) and a future action.

From these analytical considerations about Peirce’s universal categories, we move on to approach Anthropology studies in its dedication to understanding sensations, feelings and emotions. Among the first anthropologically-based empirical studies of emotions, we can include several works, most notably Marcel Mauss (2008), in his *Essay on the Gift*, in which the feelings and emotions were understood as stimuli for exchange behaviors and basic motivators of rites and their cultural meanings of incorporation and separation in the communities studied. Mauss was not concerned with precise definitions of the possibilities of human emotions, but rather with observing and understanding them. However, the main reference for the anthropology of emotions or the anthropology of the senses, understood as a theoretical-methodological line that deals with the analytical category emotion as an object of analysis, is in Le Breton (2007). In this tradition, most feelings are understood as the result of cultural traditions, which act as a filter (Le Breton, 2007, 2013, 2017). In addition, these traditions are associated with symbolic exchanges and always presuppose the principle of the imaginary or lived relationship with the other, i.e. fear, joy, hatred, love, anguish, sadness, etc. do not occur in a “pure” way, but are the result of the way we were culturally raised and live. Le Breton puts a strain on Descartes (“I think therefore I am”) by stating “I feel, therefore I am” (2007, p. 11), revealing a way of admitting that the human condition is not all spiritual or mental, but primarily bodily, sensitive, experiential, a clear convergence with Peirce’s Firstness, without, of course, mentioning it. He continues “Between the flesh of man and the flesh of the world, no rupture, but an ever-present sensory continuity” (Le Breton, 2007, p. 11). Another convergence with Peirce’s thinking on the continuity between the quality of objects and the interiority of those who experience them. We only become aware of who we are through our feelings, through the passages we experience in everyday life. Our sensitive body appropriates the phenomena and things of the world and makes them its own through the mediation of shared signs in a continuous process that is living itself. A first synthesis is that, for the Anthropology of Emotions, the senses do not depend solely on physiology, but on a cultural orientation, that leaves room for individual sensitivity (Le Breton, 2016, p. 14). Feeling does not function without the mediation of meanings given in and by language, a different position from the Peircian conception, which

sees feeling in Firstness in its qualitative immediacy and feeling in liminality—Firstness enclosed in Secondness—characterized by the affected bodily state and the initial understanding that our mind offers us.

As we have seen, while in Peircian semiotics sensations are primary, feelings are situated in the movement between Firstness, the quality of sensation, and Secondness, the physical state and initial consciousness, emotions are of the third order, i.e. interpretation, thought, generalization, and therefore directed towards the identification of regularities and growth. In Anthropology, sensations and feelings are the result of language, stemming from our personal history, our upbringing (hence the term education of the senses) and our experience in the world, as Le Breton (2016, p. 11) states: “The individual only becomes aware of himself through feeling, they experience their existence through the sensory and perceptual resonances that never cease to pass through them”, or “To feel is at the same time to unfold as a subject and to welcome the profusion outside” (p. 25). As can be seen, man is not considered to be a biological body that can be transformed by the phenomenal sphere, but rather a being of sense “To see, hear, taste, touch or feel the world is to permanently think of it through the prism of a sensory organ and make it communicable” (p. 25). However, the understanding of perceptions is convergent with Peirce, namely “Perception is not coincidence with things, but interpretation” (Le Breton, 2016, p. 12), thus intimately linked to language, although not totally subordinate to it.

Without pretending to go into depth, but with the aim to analyze Peirce’s semiotics into contact with psychoanalysis, on the path to a psychoanalytic semiotics, Cesarotto (2012, p. 141) states: “We are symbolic beings, subject to the law of language, but hostage to drives”. This concise and consequent statement highlights the profitability of psychoanalytic contributions to the understanding of emotions. In this reflexive direction, the concept of emotion is associated with the notion of desire, in other words, an unconscious energy that seeks to satisfy a lack that is constitutive of us all. Emotion would be a kind of agitation of feelings, a certain affective rapture, therefore, it is an expressive movement of the affections which, as the psychoanalyst-semiotician Montoto (2012) rightly problematizes, has in love the most significant expression of the whole current of feeling, but also in hatred, which according to the author, and in line with Freud, is not just one of the antitheses of love, since it admits the opposites “to love/be loved” and “love-hate/indifference”. (Freud, 2017).

Within these anthropological and psychoanalytical traditions, emotion can be full of cultural issues as well as unconscious issues that manifest themselves in language and which were understood and systematized by Sigmund Freud (2011), with emphasis on the work *Malaise in Civilization*. Thus, we understand

that sensations are of an internal order, a convergence between the interiority of objects and our own interiority (made possible by the sensitization of our senses), pure quality, firstness in essence, which manifests itself in a feeling—the capacity to feel; a state—that lies between Firstness and Secundness (when the feeling is in the initial thought), which is the source of emotion, the expressive body-mind convergence, interpretation, generality, mediation, Thirdness. Peirce, as an innovative scientist and a radical empiricist (Ibri, 2020), dedicated much of his reflections and writings—*Collect Papers* (CPs)—to the scientific method, universal categories, methods of thought, and therefore to what we know as reason and, for this matter, there is no prominent space in his work for understanding emotion in his anthropological or subjective approaches, however, there is an originality in understanding emotion as Thirdness, linking it to interpretative, cognitive processes and intelligence.

THE CONSUMPTION OF EMOTIONS

With all the tensions we've been through, just if we consider the 20th century, with the two great wars and their consequences (“malaise” foundations) and the arrival of the new millennium together with plural crises as diverse in nature as those arising from politics, religion, the environment and health, it's clear that reality has been very harsh, intensely shared in the media and difficult to understand when we look to the past for explanations to try to glimpse the future. “Of course, all reality disappoints, that is, perhaps the only purpose of the teleology of reality is to disappoint” (Montoto, 2012, p. 84). So all we have to do is face up to our fallible condition in this context, which is, at the very least, unfavorable, insecure and a promoter of negative emotion.

One of the classic ways of dealing with the tensions, suffering and anguish of reality is art and, as Nietzsche points out (“Art exists so that reality doesn't destroy us”), the philosopher's belief that only art would enable us to deal with our daily pains, not the Greek art of perfection, but that of tragedy, of suffering, which shows that difficulties and discomfort are part of life. Unlike the classical Greeks, who thought of art from an Apollonian perspective as a way of ordering the chaos of life, a kind of aesthetic-rational justification stemming from bewilderment at the absurdity of existence. For this reason, Nietzsche believed that the Greeks created the Olympian gods and beauty as a strategy to mask the devastating terrors of existence. Contemporary art, on the other hand, follows multiple paths, finding in protest, activism and denunciation a very powerful way of expressing itself. For some time now, beauty in the classical sense has no longer been its most significant expression, especially if we focus

on the plastic, performing and decorative arts. Neither is arousing the most sublime emotions. Pointing out and pointing out the “*no future*” to be the key. This is not a judgment, but rather an observation based on experience in the field in different research projects over more than three decades of intense and permanent scientific activity. Moreover, who occupies this sensitive place so necessary to our existence?

In contemporary times, the persuasive advertising language of products, services and brands in the context of platform media processes, arousing imaginations, producing uplifting meanings and providing sensitive immersions, fertile ground for consumption (Gobé, 2002; Lindstrom, 2005; Lipovetsky, 2020; Rocha, 1995), drives the promotion of emotion. If “. . . only that which makes sense, in a minute or essential way, enter the field of consciousness, arousing an instant of attention” (Le Breton, 2006, p. 27), or in semiotic terms “Only what means remains”, we conclude that, both to protect ourselves from reality and to link ourselves to the meanings that “matter”, the answers have been given by the advertising ecosystem through its own persuasive language (Carvalho, 1998; Perez, 2016, Pompeu 2024; Vestergaard & Schroder, 2000). Consumption offers itself as the signifier of the Lack, with the aim of giving it completeness (Perez, 2003) or, as Cesarotto and Perez (2023, p. 9) put it, “. . . many satisfactions are offered within the reach of credit cards and PayPal. Enjoy now, pay later. The principle of pleasure guides consumption, while desires are encouraged to be fulfilled here and now”. This is how the fundamental paradox of advertising presents itself: it shows lack while providing completeness. Nevertheless, invariably, it does not show the lack by explicitly reinforcing the lack; on the contrary, it’s a lack communicated and sensitively experienced by the exuberant possibility of completeness in consumption, by the wonders of having, and therefore being, pure seduction and enchantment, which is why consumption is considered satisfying (Cesarotto & Perez, 2023).

Lipovetsky (2020, p. 194) reinforces the role of advertising and marketing in promoting emotions when says: “Beyond the manufacturing industry, it is the cultural industry that, in order to attract consumers, puts affections on stage and dedicates itself to provoking emotion”. In a convergent direction, “if at a certain time in the past the institutions that mediated life in society had symbolic centrality, defining parameters and principles, establishing limits and possibilities, pointing out directions and giving certainties, today it is consumption that seems to fulfill this role” (Pompeu, 2021, p. 54). This path is clear in the recent positioning of brands taking on social causes or even socially legitimized purposes, as is the case with discourses and practices inspired by sexual, gender and ethnic identity guidelines, for example. It has special application in the context of emotional

brands (Gobé, 2002), *lovemarks* (Roberts, 2005) or *brand desire* (Ind & Iglesias, 2016), in which all brand creation and communication is centered on promoting human emotions through powerful qualitative-iconic signs (colors, lines, shapes, textures, sounds, flavors, fragrances, etc., sensitive experiences in imaginary worlds and in relationships with goods and services), capable of generating emotional interpretants, such as the expectation of lasting bonds.

Understanding consumption as

A ritual of building bonds of meaning through the mediation of (i) material culture that involves multiple heterarchical and complex symbolic processes, sometimes based on information and objectivity, sometimes on the purest enchantment. This ritual involves searching for information, acquiring, using, possessing, keeping, discarding or re-signifying products and services, all promoted and sustained by the advertising ecology of brands. (Perez, 2020, p. 10)

Thus establishing the strategic place of advertising in transferring meanings from the culturally constructed world to people's daily lives (McCracken, 2013; Perez, 2020; Perez & Trindade, 2019). This ritualistic conception, which is therefore procedural, implies the integration of cultural (value systems, beliefs, language, influence of groups, religious matrices, ethnicities, etc.), material (advertising, marketing, design, fashion, branding, trends...) and human (anthroposemiotic and psychoanalytic perspectives) dimensions in order to understand the depth of these relationships in everyday life, through an interpretive bias" (Perez, 2020, p.52). Consumption not just as the acquisition of goods or services, but as an expression of identity, a citizen's experience and an emotional experience, offered by the power of advertising that promotes possible completeness by using strategies that distance the promises from the referentiality of the offers, in an effort of imagination and creative practice to build emotional bonds, precisely because of the difficulty that referential language has in translating the finesse of the senses. Carvalho (1998, p. 11) says of advertising as a language of seduction "Everything is lights, warmth and charm, in a perfect, non-perishable beauty". In a complementary reflection, Rocha offers us the following way of understanding:

A world where products are feelings and death doesn't exist. Which is similar to life, yet completely different, since it is always successful. Where everyday life is formed in small pictures of absolute and impossible happiness. Where pain, misery, anguish and questions do not exist. A world where living beings exist and, paradoxically, human fragility is absent from it. (Rocha, 1995, p. 25)

But, before we delve into the productivist critique and get lost in the easy myriad of attacks on the capitalist system, blaming advertising as a demonic discourse and consumption as a degrading expression of human materialism (Baudrillard, 2009, Bauman, 2008 and Veblen, 1965 are already sufficient in this endeavor, as we will see below), it is important to remember that advertising does not disguise its intentions, unlike other discourses that may be loaded with vile intentions, but disguise themselves as news, religion or even uncommitted entertainment. It is worth remembering what advertising is, as presented by Piratininga (1994, p. 21):

No one can forget, for a single moment, that commercial advertising, even if ideologically engaged in disseminating ethical and moral values of behavior, has the objective and primary function of informing the characteristics of this or that product or service, in order to promote its sale, because for this it is paid.

Thus, we see how consumption, through advertising ecology and its rituals of transferring meaning, is a source of engagement and building bonds, the foundation of everyday emotions, provided by the persuasive and sensitive advertising language of our times, made possible by the evolution of technological mechanisms that favor the stimulation of our senses, providing gratifying sensations, by overflowing creativity and by products and access to possible worlds that are powerful in promoting the feeling of well-being (Cesarotto & Perez, 2023), seduction (Lipovetsky, 2020) and pleasure, intentionally centered on the exploration of scopic signs (Perez, 2022, p. 88), even with the certainty of the transience of completeness, never assumed.

CONSUMPTION: FROM AN OBJECT OF MOCKERY TO AN ACT OF LOVE

The tradition of the productivist sociological bias in the Humanities and Social Sciences establishes that work is considered a source of creativity, authenticity and identity, and consumption is pure alienation, lack of originality and an increasingly individualistic, short-sighted, disaggregating and, more recently, destructive process of the natural environment. This position was decisive for the maxim “not working is a stigma”, while not consuming is a quality, morally superior to its inverse (Barbosa & Campbell, 2006). Reinforced by reductionist perspectives in the understanding of consumption, with emphasis on Veblen (1965), with the work *Theory of the Leisure Class*, pecuniary emulation (competition through the display of signs of wealth and high status) and conspicuous consumption (linked to waste), passing through Simmel (2006, 2013), responsible for the dissemination

of the concept of trickle down (already present in Veblen's propositions), more recently in Baudrillard (2010) with the promotion of unhappiness resulting from unfulfilled promises, consumption continues more as an object of disdain than as a transversal and inevitable phenomenon in contemporary life. In this sense, in a similar direction Bauman (2008), in *Life for Consumption*, directs criticism along the path of the objectification of subjects and their transformation into merchandise, let us see:

In consumer society, no one can become a subject without first becoming a commodity, and no one can maintain his or her subjectivity without perpetually reanimating, resuscitating, and recharging the capacities expected and required of a saleable commodity. (Bauman, 2008, p. 20)

Bauman (2008, p. 60) also draws attention to the agoristic time established by consumption: "The consumer society is perhaps the only one in human history to promote happiness in earthly life, here and now and with each successive now . . .". In this understanding, it seems that consumption is just deception, which in fact is not entirely true, as we will see below, since consumption becomes ritualistic in everyday life and sacralized. Although the tradition of disdaining consumption has been dominant over centuries of reflection and knowledge production, we have found other perspectives for studying it, which broaden understanding and bring relevance to our discussion. We are not promoting the divinization of consumption; on the contrary, criticism needs to be present, especially in social and economic contexts of great distance and differences in access, such as Brazil and Latin America. In this respect, we should highlight Mary Douglas and Isherwood's (2004, p. 26) postulation in *The World of Goods*:

There is currently a tendency in the professional literature on consumption to assume that people buy goods for two or three narrow purposes: material well-being, psychological well-being and exhibition. The first two are not individual needs: the need for food, clothing and shelter, and for peace of mind and recreation. The latter is a general term that covers all of society's demands. These tend to be roughly summarized as competitive display. Veblen is partly responsible for this, if we consider the breadth of circulation of his analysis of the idle class and the influence of his generalized contempt for conspicuous consumption. Several changes need to be made to bring the discussion back to a more realistic level.

In addition to the need to understand consumption from a plural perspective, there are conceptions that associate consumption with the constitution of the

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identities of contemporary subjects, with emphasis on the pragmatic contributions of André (2006) who understands identity as repetition and its evidence in psychosocial processes, with consumption being central in contemporary metropolitan areas, a daily itinerary for the constitution of subjectivities, in line with Canevacci (2008). In a complementary direction, Campbell (2001, p. 42) understands the identity-consumption dialog, the foundation of social life:

The romantic insistence on the unique and autonomous character of the self, as well as on its realization through experience and creativity, at the same time derives from and corroborates the consumer revolution. Increasingly, individuals were prepared to assume that the self is constructed through consumption (and that) consumption expresses the self.

Feeling like a citizen is a postulation highlighted in the research of various scientific regionalities and, more recently, has received attention from consumer scholars, especially Soper & Trentmann (2008), Taschner (2009) and Canclini (2010), who focuses on consumption in Latin America. The author states:

Being a citizen is not just about the rights recognized by state apparatuses for those born in a territory, but also about the social and cultural practices that give a sense of belonging, and make those who have the same language, similar forms of organization and satisfaction of needs feel different. (García Canclini, 2010, p. 35)

Another aspect highlighted by García Canclini's reflections is the observation that Consumption helps us to think, therefore it is also a reflective path to self-knowledge and its expansion, in line with what Douglas and Isherwood (2004) already advocated:

We start from the hypothesis that when we select goods and appropriate them, we define what we consider to be publicly valuable, as well as the ways in which we integrate and distinguish ourselves in society, combining the pragmatic and the pleasurable. (García Canclini, 2010, p. 35)

These broader perspectives on consumption reveal an openness to understanding what is one of the most important mechanisms of expression in contemporary life in the West and much of the East. Consumption is identity, consumption is citizenship, and consumption serves to think. However, if there is a radicalism in the restricted understanding of consumption as ostentation or simply marking and social differentiation, the understanding of consumption

as an act of love is innovative. Daniel Miller (2002, p. 142) is precise when he understands consumption as a mechanism that fosters emotional relationships:

. . . There may be resistance to the idea that there are values created through the range and form of the commodities themselves that contribute to the humanity of the buyers... An essential component of the argument is that objects are means to create loving relationships between subjects and not some kind of materialistic dead end that diverts devotion from the proper subject – other people.

Consumption promotes relationships between people, so it may not degrade them, but on the contrary, foster them, making them even more enjoyable, binding and overflowing with long-lasting meanings. This path is emblematic when we look at the meanings of souvenirs, objects whose function of affection and memory is predominant over any functionality they may have, and gifts and the act of giving gifts, affective anthropogenic phenomena par excellence. As we can see below, material consumer culture has the capacity to promote positive feelings and pleasurable emotions:

When we analyzed the feelings involved in the act of giving and receiving gifts, we noticed an important similarity: very positive feelings ranging from happiness to gratitude, joy, affection and love. However, while receiving gifts didn't elicit any negative or even tense responses, feelings related to anxiety (such as expectation, not knowing) appear with some recurrence in the context of giving gifts, establishing an important field of interdisciplinary research into reactions to gifts and whether or not they are in line with the expectations of those giving the gift. (Perez & Pompeu, 2021)

Nevertheless, consumption as an act of love is not only included in gifts and giving as reciprocity, gratitude or affection (it would not be in gifts out of obligation), it is very much alive in the daily lives of all of us, involving an amalgam between the act of buying, love and sacrifice. When we make the other the object of our desire, placing them in reference, as a parameter for our choices, we are in the essence of affections, since from a psychoanalytic perspective, we desire the desire of the other, our desire is always mimetic (Girard, 2011). And by placing it ahead of our own desires, the act of buying becomes a sacrifice, renewing relationships, prioritizing empathetic affections, legitimizing love. What would it be but love to buy a chicken breast for your child's dinner, while the parents eat chicken wings? Wouldn't it be love to give the other person something they consider very meaningful, so that the recipient feels like the

most important person in the world, because the giver knows them like no one else? Feeling unique is perhaps the most joyful feeling we can experience. Isn't it love, the brooch inherited from the grandmother that carries multiple meanings in a family transmission of a product that was once an object of purchase (or gift), and now follows its perennial trajectory of material culture, with more robust levels of meanings, memories and feelings, and can even be an object of worship and devotion, often not even materializing in use?

According to Miller (2002, p. 162), when we consume outside the context of consumption for oneself, "the act of buying is an interpretation of the other as a subject that desires". It is the recognition of singularity and otherness in its essence. It wouldn't necessarily be buying the things that others want, but fighting to continue relating to the subjects who want those things, not least because satisfaction is always transitory, and therefore infinite in possibilities, but experienced in the emotion of searching, buying, using, being able to or re-signifying the (i)material culture of consumption, which can put us in communion.

Thus, we understand the privileged place of contemporary consumption as a promoter of pleasure, well-being and beauty through its sign strategies that offer exuberant stimuli to our senses (incitement to sensations); promote pleasurable states (positive feelings) that can occur through purchase, use, possession and exchange of goods and access; and overflow into affective processes (favorable, pleasurable emotions, satisfaction) that are the foundations of our identity, citizen belonging, social differentiation, exacerbated materialism, narcissistic passion, but also love for others.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Reflecting on the semiotics of affect puts us under an ethical responsibility to understand in a multidisciplinary way what human sensations, feelings and emotions are like and on what basis they are structured. It requires an understanding of the fusion between the sensitive interiority of subjects and objects, in a *continuum*, pure quality, the beginning of semiosis, Firstness, with the second instance, feelings, the capacity to feel, which is placed in the liminality between Firstness (the qualities that enter us through the senses) and initial consciousness, feeling, Secondness, with emotion as the result, response, generality, effect produced, interpretation, therefore Thirdness. These correlations are the explanatory basis for why Peirce calls this part of his philosophical reflections the universal categories of experience and thought.

In contemporary times and in the context of aesthetic capitalism (Lipovetsky & Serroy, 2015), the sources of emotion are strongly mediatized and find their

most powerful source in consumption, both due to the unimaginable advance in technologies for producing products and services - that stimulate our senses in physical and digital explorations and their mixtures, affecting us by the qualities of things and phenomena, - and those of the circulation of meanings (physical spaces, traditional media, social media, messaging apps, filters, etc., constituting an immersive emotional ambience). Bearing in mind that advertising, the very language of consumption, seeks to enchant and seduce, and therefore to emote in order to sell, the sign-strategic chain involves promoting pleasant sensations that generate favorable feelings and unique emotions and, at the very most, longer-lasting emotional bonds with the products and brands that sustain the endless cycle of desire-satisfaction-erosion-new desire, the foundation of our existence.

With contexts of plural crises, disbelief in institutions and the slide of art towards activism and complaints, consumption presents itself as a daily praxis full of aesthetic and ethical meanings, engendered in active ritualistic logics that constitute relationships, interfere in them and refer back to them, through the circulation of meanings inherent in its dynamics. Consumption can reveal contradictions between self-image and advertising idealization or the devaluation of the self by others. It can express the nature of power, such as the obligatory gift that cannot be refused or the submissive agreement with what has been determined by others (in family consumption, for example). We can reflect even more forcefully on the millions of Brazilians, Latin Americans, Africans and so many other individuals in different parts of the world who are cut off from consumption, in which “days without shopping” (typical hypocrisy of those who have everything) is meaningless because every day is a day without shopping. Nevertheless, neither can we ignore the centrality of consumption in contemporary life. Consumption refers to the social and intimate relationships we have, and what we want from them, much more than a mere materialistic exercise in class marking, in an essentially sociological and pseudo-Marxist approach. It is in consumption, by the force of its presence and transversality, that we experience new sensitivities, we experience the possibilities. ■

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