

## Psicologia: Teoria e Pesquisa



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# Iconicity and Complexity in Hypnotic Communication<sup>1</sup>

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**ABSTRACT** - The present paper proposes a theoretical approximation between iconicity, which is the signs' ability to transmit the resemblance with objects, and a complex perspective of hypnotic communication. The discussion is developed based on three main topics. The first is that of semiotic heterogeneity of communicative processes of hypnosis; the second consists of an articulation between the individual and the collective; and third, in the relation between the notions of *ethos* and sentiment. The paper concludes that in spite of conceptual difficulties the relationship between iconicity and complexity propitiates great contributions regarding important themes in hypnotic communication, such as subjectivity, the therapist's experience, research, and belonging.

**Keywords:** iconicity; hypnotic communication; complexity; semiotics; trance

## Iconicidade e Complexidade na Comunicação Hipnótica

**RESUMO** - O presente trabalho busca promover uma aproximação teórica entre a iconicidade, capacidade dos signos de transmitirem qualidades de um objeto, e uma perspectiva complexa da comunicação hipnótica. Essa discussão é desenvolvida em torno de três tópicos principais. O primeiro é a heterogeneidade semiótica dos processos comunicacionais da hipnose; o segundo consiste numa articulação entre o individual e o coletivo; e o terceiro, nas relações entre a noção de *ethos* e sentimento. O trabalho é concluído destacando que, malgrado as dificuldades conceituais, as relações entre iconicidade e complexidade proporcionam grandes contribuições no que diz respeito a temas importantes da comunicação hipnótica, como a subjetividade, a experiência do terapeuta, a pesquisa e o pertencimento.

**Palavras-chave:** iconicidade, comunicação hipnótica, complexidade, semiótica, transe

Contemporary surveys usually report the hypnotic communication in a reductionist view that privileges the response standards as axis of analysis and the evaluation instrumentalism as focus of research (Jensen & Patterson, 2014). With few exceptions (Jamieson, 2007; Michaux, 2002) that seek for explanatory proposals, most surveys are centered on the evaluation of efficacy, disregarding the approach of important processes traditionally comprised by hypnotic communication as a field. These processes include mutual influence, culture, subjectivity and creative aspects involving the unconscious and the subject (Erickson & Rossi, 1979; Roustang, 2015). Similar perspectives promote a unilateral, standardized and instrumentalist concept of hypnotic communication, centered on the therapist's power over an automaton individual, where the topic is intensively evaluated and measured, but hardly thought.

In this sense, a complex perspective, i.e., that coordinates different dimensions and knowledge (Morin, 1996; 2001; 2005), to understand hypnotic communication becomes crucial, for different reasons. First, what happens between the main actors of the hypnotic scene is not restricted to an individual perspective, considering that this context and the experience of participants are consistently permeated

by collective processes of culture, biology, and of social and institutional exchanges (Clément, 2011; Midol, 2010). Secondly, this process are not restricted to one single type of knowledge, such as psychology, and involves several dimensions that make up the sociocultural fabric such as culture, religion, gender, economics, family and class belonging (Neubern, 2013a). In third place, the subjective fabric weaved between these dimensions is not limited to one single unit, such as the response, but is expanded to a heterogeneous and intricate mesh of processes. This mesh is created by these dimensions (Michaux, 2002; Roustang, 2015) and also influence them, involving symbolic, emotional, vital and cognitive aspects.

Regarding the first two aspects above, some authors in the literature about hypnosis and similar fields have provided significant contributions, although they sometimes fail in explaining the links with its complexity. Both the relationship between the individual and the collective in the experience of trance and its interdisciplinary dimension raise interest of and count on significant contributions by different authors (Clément, 2011; Midol, 2010; Morin, 2001; Neubern, 2013a). Regarding the third topic, however, the discussion about hypnotic communication remains full of gaps concerning a complex perspective. Important authors (Erickson, 1992; Roustang, 2015) highlight different elements existing in the process. However, they do not develop their ideas about how these are coordinated in the communication fabric, and the resulting implications. Other authors seem to replicate the dichotomy found in psychotherapies (Michaux, 2002) between the focus on pattern involving sequences of behaviors and cognitions,

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or on the meaning, mainly highlighting language and the symbolic production.

Which would be the interfaces and differences between these focuses, how would these act on the construction of trance, how would the unconscious process be accessed, if they would do it differently and how they would engage the subject and his/her world are topics that these authors do not further, despite its importance to understand and approach the topic. Although highlighted in some works (Erickson & Rossi, 1979; Roustang, 2015) the richness of hypnotic communication is disregarded in conceptual terms, making room to reductionist concepts of monolithic analyses that seldom approach the significant experience promoted in the hypnotic communication.

That way, iconicity, i.e., the capacity of signs to transmit the qualities of an object (Hiraga, 2005; Jappy, 2010; Nöth, 2015), brings about highly relevant perspectives. In principle, it implies breaking the strict limits of alterity that set the subject apart from the social in hypnosis, still deeply marked by individualist perspectives that the subject's whole world is limited by huge barriers in the exchange with the social (Clément, 2011). At the same time, iconicity provides a broad understanding on different types of elements articulated in the communication fabric (Constantini, 2010; Bordron, 2011), just like happens in hypnosis that, in addition to words, also brings up vital (sounds, tones of voices, breaks), visual and emotional transmissions (Neubern, 2013b; Roustang, 2015). There is a great capacity of evoking processes and deep feelings of human experience (Jappy, 2013), in addition to the rational comprehension. Therefore, even if not developed in the contexts of processes wherein hypnotic communication takes place - the human subjectivity -, iconicity can be of utmost relevance for a complex understanding of the hypnotic communication itself, because it holds fundamental elements to that proposal.

Therefore, this study aims to promote a theoretical convergence between iconicity (Jappy, 2010; 2013; Nöth, 2015) and a complex perspective of hypnotic communication (Morin, 1996; 2001; Neubern, 2012; 2013a; 2013b; 2014). That convergence will be developed based on an analysis of possibilities to apply some notions of iconicity in the hypnotic communication - semiotic heterogeneity, relationships between the individual and the collective and between ethos and feeling -, followed by a critical reflection about iconicity anchored in concepts of complex thought, as further described.

### Basic assumptions

The capacity of transmitting the qualities of an object, characteristic to the iconicity, is originally linked to Charles Peirce's semiotic (quoted in Jappy, 2010; 2013), but is now also conceived under other perspectives (Hiraga, 2005; Hancil & Hirst, 2013). Here we will adopt Peirce's (1989) semiotic as core reference to discuss it through contemporary authors (Bergman, 2009; Colapietro, 1989; Jappy, 2010; Nöth, 2015; Santaella, 2009; Short, 2007). Iconicity is deeply bound to the concept of sign, i.e.,

what mediates an object and the effect it produces on the individual's mind, known as interpretant (Jappy, 2013, p. 4). The types of signs can be classified in three categories, according to their objectives<sup>3</sup> (Peirce, 1989): Icons - that give rise to the term 'iconicity' - which are signs that represent their objective, through qualitative similitude, such as images and drawings; indexes, which are signs that represent their objectives through a concrete physical tie such as footprints, an order, a call; symbols, that are signs that represent their objects following a general law, species or convention, as happens with language and scientific laws. It is worth emphasizing that these categories are general and that, in a concrete communication process, the different signs are coordinated in broader semiotic forms or configurations (Bergman, 2009). Part of the first logical order between signs, icons are on the baseline of operations of indexes and symbols and so, in any communication process between individuals, some iconicity follows the semiotic ecology of this process (Jappy, 2010, p. 141) that, however, varies depending on how such signs are coordinated.

It is also worth mentioning that these signs somehow correspond to three general categories of the human experience, i.e., on how the mind captures what the world brings to it. According to Peirce (1989) these would be: firstness, experience of the possibility, of the qualitative, feelings, eternal present; secondness, the reaction, conflict, interaction, concrete, existing and singular phenomena; thirdness, the thinking, mediation, general, the symbolic plan. Therefore, signs recall these logical universes of human experience, establishing important links of research between the object they represent and what they produce in the minds of those under their influence.

In this sense, Peirce (quoted in Nöth, 2015, p. 19) asserted that pure icons are imaginary, while hypoicons are signs materialized in some kind of visual, auditory or linguist semiotic. These can be the images that resemble the qualities of their objects (first-firstness), the diagrams that reproduce the structure of data relations (second-firstness), and the metaphors that propose, in the same sign, the overlapping of different fields (third-firstness). As that, they have the capacity to access, in addition to the conscious control, fundamental, qualitative and sentimental dispositions of the human experience (firstness). These dispositions pre-date, in terms of history and experiences, the construction of the *self* (for this reason the notion of what comes *first*) and are like self-reference centers to subjectivity (identity), modes of relation, overreaching important topics of the construction of the subject's senses (Schoore, 2016).

Hypnosis, in turn, here is conceived in a complex perspective (Neubern, 2013a; 2013b; 2014), including the coordination of different dimensions, processes and wis-

3 Due to space limitations, the other trichotomies will not be deeply analyzed herein.

These classify signs regarding themselves and their interpretants.

Regarding themselves they can be: legi-signs (law, logic), sin-signs (existent, singular), quali-signs (quality). Regarding interpretants, they may be rema (quality, monad), learners (reaction, dyad) and arguments (thinking, triad).

doms that make up a reality, making up a whole without diluting the specificity of their components (Morin, 2001). Specifically for hypnosis, it integrates two highly-related processes that are typically separated in different research traditions (Midol, 2010): communication, to be discussed as focus of this study, and the trance experience. This last is characterized by several changes on the *self-world* references typical to ordinary consciousness (time, space, matter, cause, other) followed by the emergence of heterogeneous and polyphonic unconscious processes (Morin, 1996). Therefore, at the same time that during trance the subject may be on two different places and times simultaneously, he/she can also interact with a set of instances that make up his/her sociocultural and biological world, such as meeting someone remarkable in his/her relationships (*you*), the negotiation with a being that recalls his/her cultural belonging such as a saint, spirit, *orixa* (*we*) or even triggering processes like anesthesia and analgesia that recall a phylogenetic heritage (*it*).

In this sense, the subject - as emergent, active and creative quality of the complex system of human experience (Morin, 2001; Neubern, 2014) - plays a core role. Identifying with the *self* of the ordinary consciousness, but not limited to it, the subject can remain more or less active during trance, establishing different types of relations with these instances, ranging from negotiation and dialogue to the conflict typical to possessions. Although in some situations it seems to be eclipsed during the process (Clément, 2011; Midol, 2010), it has an important therapeutic process as mediator of the instances that represent the dilemmas between different sociocultural worlds of an individual's life, like the conflicts between family legacy and the individual needs, or between the spiritual mission and the worldly obligations (Neubern, 2013a; Nathan, 2004).

Trance experience gathers different registries such as culture, society, economy, spirituality, politics, ethnics and social class, which are integrated to the subject's experience through complex systems - the configurations. As systems (Morin, 1996; Neubern, 2014), configurations are autonomous and dependent on the world, and have the capacity of self-creating from their laws and relationship with the world, so as to build symbolic and emotional senses (Gonzalez Rey, 2011), as well as vital, imaginary and sensory processes (Merleau-Ponty, 2008). This way, they imply the hologram principle (Morin, 2001) where the whole, such as the cultural and biological processes, may be in a simple part without dissolving or eliminating it. They also coordinate the influence of different pairs that are opposite in the psychology schools (Neubern, 2014), such as individual x social, individual x collective, inner x outer, determinism x freedom, essence x existence, and singular x universal.

### Iconicity and Hypnotic Communication

In hypnotic terms, the gesture, the mime and the relational role, just like analogies, metaphors, words games and stories, have this subliminal capacity of transmitting the similitude of objects, reaching these dimensions of firstness. The quote below refers to a hypnotic induction performed (Erickson &

Rossi, 1977) with a student interested in studying hypnosis, and is very illustrative:

*When you attended the kindergarten, the task of learning letters and numbers seemed impossible... recognized letter A, differentiate a Q from an O was really, really hard. But you learned to draw some kind of mental images. You did not know by that time, but there was a permanent mental image. And later at school you developed other mental images of words or phrases. You developed more and more mental images, unaware that you were developing mental images... and you can retrieve all these images.* (pp. 6 – 7).

Following we can find two major forms of oral hypoicons, translated by the author: the diagrams and metaphors (Jappy, 2010; 2013). The first repeats the structure of relationship between its objects, like as if it was representing these on a visual scheme or illustration. This is true for a lot of the abovementioned descriptive propositions such as “*When you attended the kindergarten, the task of learning letters and numbers seemed impossible...*” This description of the past, however, is not as accurate as in the technical diagrams that include very specific coordinates such as numbers, signs and scales, which make it closer to the indexes (Jappy, 2010), because they vaguely include only some elements of the object. Temporal sequence is also a pertinent qualitative element, considering that it intends to mirror likely happenings of the student's live in a temporal logic that is somehow revived by her.

On the other hand, if we contextualize these suggestions in that setting, they can also be conceived as metaphors, because they involve an implicit comparison between objects from different domains (Jappy, 2010; 2013). In this specific case, the student is there to learn hypnosis, and can surely find several difficulties because this is a subject she is not very familiar with. Therefore, Erickson refers to her as a child also in a learning context (school) facing tasks she was not familiar with yet (learning letters and numbers). The solution proposed in the metaphor - that, even unaware, the child has developed mental images that helped her to read and write over time - recalls a likely condition for the current learning aimed by the student (learn hypnosis). However, Erickson does not specify the connection between one scenario and the other. This way, induction can be conceived as a mere tale, seemingly unrelated with the student's current context of learning.

It is worth mentioning that iconicity is also present in non-verbal processes that are an important moment of the hypnotic communication. Although the quote discussed here does not have many elements, since it is a written record, we could consider that the relationship mode assumed by the therapist towards the subject (teacher) is an important way of hypnotic communication intertwined with iconicity, since it seems to mirror something or somebody of the subject's world. The therapist can take on a dramatic role before the subject, a role built in accordance with the subject's singularity and clinical demands (Neubern, 2012). This role is not explained but is showed to the subject, performed in the kids of relationships that deeply access it, touching on emotional and unconscious processes meaningful to his/her therapy. Although keeping a tone of neutrality the therapist brings in his/her corporeality, gestures, expressions, ways of talking and attitudes towards the subject, a role that resembles some important figure or relationship of his subjective world, regardless if it is concrete

or imaginary, with whom the subject can relate to build new therapeutic alternatives.

Without losing sight of the ethical and technical role of therapists, the therapist can become a *teacher* to someone that needs to be a student or be mentored; a *rival* to someone who needs a challenge; a *mother* to someone needing maternal bonds and care; or a *tyrant* to someone who needs to be subdued or to rebel (Neubern, 2012). These roles serve as powerful therapeutic metaphors (Nöth, 2015) because: a) they gather two different fields in the figure of the therapist: the professional therapist (explicit - in the case above, Erickson, hypnosis teacher) and that represented in the subject's subjectivity (implicit - the kindergarten teacher); b) they make a reference required by interpretants (the third element of the sign) of the subject that, at some level, needs to associate these objects. These modes of relationship are not intended to show to the subject any eventual influence hidden in his/her subjectivity (which could be an artificial translation of the symbolic), but to mobilize deep emotional processes configured in actions, modes of relationship, ways of conceiving the world, symptoms and defenses related to limitations and centers that generate suffering to the subject.

However, there is another dimension of non-verbal processes of the suggestions that recall a set of the therapist's forms, unintended to a large extent, that seem to recall his/her own experience of trance (Neubern, 2013b). These are more or less perceivable processes of change of the breathing rhythm, slight muscle spasm, gentle and extended tone of voice, sluggish gestures, slowness and breaks on the speech, body and face relaxation, and a look little responsive to the environment, among others. In a semiotic light, even been individually indexes, they work in group as *images* as they do nothing but present to the subject several qualities of an object (Nöth, 2015). In other words, this signs recall, by similitude, the experiences of sleep and unconscious (Jouvet, 2016), as well as archaic processes of subjective constitution prior to the constitution of the *self*, when the baby, to a large extent undifferentiated from the mother, seems to be immersed in an amalgam of sensations and affections<sup>4</sup> (Cyrułnik, 2000).

### Semiotic heterogeneity

This discussion brings about the importance of devising the hypnotic communication through complex forms of signs of different logics that intertwine in the relational process, weaving a very heterogeneous semiotic fabric. Generally speaking, in the example above we could consider that the emotional content evoked by iconicity is present in images, diagrams and metaphors, making up a diversified semiotic mesh that appeals to different dimensions of human experience. This perspective is particularly important

to overcome a polarization typical to the hypnosis-related psychotherapy field (Michaux, 2002), where some therapists tend to consider the suggestion as an eminently symbolic process (meaning), while others tend to conceive it as patterns of behavior or information.

Peirce's notion of sign, in turn, contradicts the similar opposition since it allows establishing a continuum between them, where patterns and meanings are made of the same semiotic elements, and only the logic prevalence of the form how these are constituted differs. Patterns can comprise symbols and icons, although the prevalence of secondness gets them closer to indexes, icons and diagrams. As regards the hypnotic language (Erickson & Rossi, 1979) this is also the site for some truisms and descriptions. At the same time, meanings contain indexes and icons, although the prevalence of thirdness places them as symbols, legi-signs and metaphors. In hypnotic terms (Erickson & Rossi, 1979) this is the site for metaphors and stories.

The semiotic forms favor much smoother and fruitful transit between the notions of patterns and meanings, so as to favor not only an interchange between these, but also a discussion about their theoretical and clinical pertinence in terms of the capacity of addressing a given dimension of secondness or thirdness in a therapeutic process. The urgent clinical needs of a person screaming on the hospital hallways because she has her leg broken, may be purely oriented to a secondness dimension, through techniques that trigger analgesia and anesthesia. On the other hand, the grievance of a person that has just widowed may be more oriented to a thirdness dimension, where the symbolic reconstruction is crucial.

Both in the prevalence of secondness and thirdness, however, iconicity is remarkable and favors the access to unconscious processes, mainly referring to feelings. As aforementioned, the sequence of diagrams, interspersed with breaks and sound variations in the therapist's speech and images, resembles some unconscious patterns of operation where more or less rambling associations of perceptions, ideas and feelings mark the beginning of the dream (Jouvet, 2016) or trance (Jamieson, 2007). The diagrams contain symbols, but their expressions here are dominated by the expressed sequence, bringing about the logic of patterns. If we take the illustration as a whole, the resulting metaphor, however, the current context is similar to a general context experienced in the student's childhood. It is amazing to see that this dimension of experience is also at a thirdness level marked by thirdness, where the symbolic production prevails.

Both in metaphors and diagrams, the proposed similitude is also crossed by small differences to favor the therapeutic change. For diagrams, an element is included to change the order of difficulties, i.e., the creation of mental images that helped overcoming the obstacles. For the metaphor, this change implies a set of meanings or main messages that enable substantive changes on the story told by the subject. In both cases, these differences evoke experiences of the student herself, highly colored by emotional processes (firstness) on the baseline of her configurations about the topic being worked on.

As that, considering the clinical hypnosis as a way of research, semiotic forms are of utmost relevance because of the materiality of signs (Bergman, 2009; Short, 2007),

4 The jesting comparisons of some subjects between these signs and the lullabies are not pointless, notably because of the regressive appeal that they comprise. However, this similitude promoted by images should not assume a chronological regression to the past, since not even the forms that house the different suggestions are limited to the firstness of images, as well as because one could not break apart the remainder fields that also make up the experience (secondness and thirdness).

i.e., the substrate (word, image, sound) where the hypoicon is materialized. Therefore, even with no guarantee that the elements that make up the sign are always found during the survey, the therapist comes across the need for investigating the paths offered by the empirical moments, to some extent avoiding the self-evident and self-explanatory categories that often block the potential of dialogues with the fields surveyed (Gonzalez Rey, 2011). These forms are not data *per se*, but systems to be surveyed from their own logics rather than through the therapist's previous thoughts that, many times, are imposed on the survey, thus confirming its assumptions and suffocating the dialogue with the empirical.

### Individual and collective

A second topic that should be highlighted is that, through its concept of sign, iconicity puts into perspective the dimensions between the inner and the outer, as well as between individual and collective (Bergman, 2009). These issues are traditionally presented as a dichotomy in hypnosis (Neubern, 2014). Considering that a hypoicon implies firstness of participants, it is a concept that crosses the rigid frontiers of alterity, through which people conceive their relationships with the world. In this light Bergman (2009) advocates for a communication concept where two minds share a sort of common field of interpretation. In other words, a field defined not only by the common grounds of the experience, but also by sharing the interpretation capacity managed in the communication process.

Regarding the hypnotic communication, that perspective enables relaxing the strict sociocultural limits of the *self* to break the individualist notion that prevails in hypnosis (Clément, 2011). Suggestions, just like the trance, are not purely internal and individual phenomenon, limited to something confined "in" the subject, and should also be conceived regarding the exchanges with the social world. Considering that this *self* is displaced as the heart of the experience during the trance experience, this communication becomes something much more complex and polyphonic, since it involves other agencies that emerge in the process (Morin, 1996; Neubern, 2014). The view of an important affective figure of the past (which could represent a *you* to the subject), of a saint or *orixa* (which could represent a cultural *we*) can be conceived as signs connected to this relational moment and, at the same time, connect the different collective dimensions in which the subject participates. These voices resemble a non-linear communication process and conceive the social as something deeply rooted in affective and unconscious systems of the subject's subjectivity. In brief, the trance experience is guided by deep self-references (*selves*) and, at the same time, is closely related to the sociocultural game that precedes it (*echo*) (Morin, 2005; Neubern, 2014).

Also worth of notice is the role of the sign (medium) played by the *self* during hypnotic communication. When displaced as the supposed center of decision and control, this *self*, in semiotic terms, mediates the relationships between collective wisdoms and influences and other social life representatives with whom the subject has pertinent relationships. These questions are not characterized only for the vague,

generic and uncertain content of the individuals' daily communication with the self in self-reflection (Bergman, 2009) but, mainly, for the role in which the *self* is placed in a similar process - that of a mediator between worlds.

In these conditions, the *self* is placed as a mediator between universes that, to some extent, are opposite in the contemporary western cultures (Clément, 2011; Nathan, 2004). This not only entails multiple possibilities of conflict and negotiation (visible x invisible, reality x noosphere, sacred x profane, normality x madness, material x spiritual), but also a high-complex vision where the individual experience stages the meeting of such different worlds (Morin, 1991; 2001) through trance. Even the *self* can no longer stay in the illusory condition of control; its actions and decisions allow bridging these universes, mainly when attitude is oriented as negotiation (Nathan, 2004; Neubern, 2013a). Therefore, the *self* moves away from the reified and terminal condition of entity towards a form, because it is challenged to overcome the thwarted path between universes that are many times in conflict, enabling the possibility of dialogue, conversation and meaning.

In this sense, iconicity is of significant relevance to understand this *self* that develops the mediation between collective worlds. Regarding the subject, visualizations, messages and expressions that emerge during the trance, which can be constituted as different hypoicons (Jappy, 2010), usually are important semiotic forms in the communication with those worlds. Typically, in therapy cases these hypoicons are important messages to the subject and its nucleus of relationships, that can be subject to different hermeneutic treatments (Nathan, 2004; Neubern, 2013a), like an unresolved past problem with the family, a significant and undeveloped potential, a transgenerational legacy that should be left behind, or a spiritual mission or obligation that cannot be neglected. These messages usually regard the subject's place in the world in relation to the self and to the others, and his/her existential perspectives to life, mainly because they appeal to a firstness dimension fundamental to the subjective constitution of the subject.

Regarding the therapist, in turn, the *legi-signs* that constitute the hypnotic technique refer to a perspective that, in its social practice, he/she is not alone because he/she is accompanied by the voices of communities that precede his/her training, even if he/she had not met them directly. Therefore, the techniques are carriers of the masters' voices, of concepts shared in groups, such as visions and theories passed through specific rituals of training. Except if very diverse or even contrary<sup>5</sup> to the firstness dispositions, techniques are important for the therapist, because these work as hypoicons, given the strong emotional appeal present in the therapist's training. Therapists usually keep in memory some scenes of co-existence (images), shared histories (metaphors) and study schedules (diagrams) of that training, which are emotionally integrated to their subjectivity. This is what allows these to become part of the therapist him/herself (Erickson & Rossi,

5 This affirmation refers to people trained in a therapeutic school with no further identification with it. This is a common phenomenon these days. Sometimes, the relation with education is nothing but technical and motivated by interests that little have to do with deeper dispositions, i.e., interests socially learned but empty of repercussions regarding the firstness dispositions.

1979) over time. Therefore, the communication with the other must necessarily pass by the communication with the self.

### **Ethos and feeling**

Because of its appeal to the core dimensions of experience, iconicity brings about very helpful issues related to hypnotic communication. First, because this clinic of *showing*, i.e., characterized by iconicity in its semiotic forms, brings remarkable radicality regarding the access to the unconscious universe of the subject. To some extent the images, diagrams and metaphors organized in complex semiotic forms communicate something to other experience agencies beyond the *self* (Neubern, 2014), engaging them in processes on the baseline of identity, defenses, modes of relationship, production of suffering (including symptoms) and therapeutic possibilities (Schore, 2016).

It is like as if this *show* present, for example, in the actions of a role taken on by the therapist could (re)launch a way of communication and experience familiar to the subject, but not at a conscious level, that could be implied in different ways in deep firstness experiences. This process can promote changes on his/her life thematic that, through ordinary conscious ways, would never be possible. It is like as if to communicate with this unconscious universe of spiritual beings (Nathan, 2004), ideas, wisdoms, dreams (Morin, 1991), the therapist needed a semiotic array deeply intertwined by iconicity in the condition of what is first, previous and fundamental.

Secondly, there is the dimension of the therapist's feeling implied in the construction of this form of communication. To reach some degree of recognition that allows it to this subject, that falls into and out of trance in a therapeutic link, iconicity cannot be a mechanical act of technical production. Rather, it must be an experience, creative process that is also marked by the therapist's first experience - his/her own feelings. Although sometimes the therapist's intentions are not clear, it is through feelings that the similitude promoted by iconicity can be established. In other words, what is deep and first in the therapist wishes to meet what is deep and first in the subject, in a process focused on potentiality and change.

In this sense, communication cannot be limited to a computer-based transmission of information, nor to the technical intervention or a subjective exchange between individuals. As the therapist and the subject recall their own firstness, they seek for themselves in their own world of belonging or *ethos* (Morin, 2005), worlds than they can call theirs and also belong to them. This world can be maximized in trance when they come across not only friends, relatives and important persons, but also the spiritual beings of their invisible cultural universe (Nathan, 2004). Therefore communication, in its deepest form, is a process in which subjects are the key players but that necessarily happens between different *ethoses*, in a meeting between worlds.

### **Iconicity and Complexity: A Possible Way**

The initial approaching between iconicity and complexity in clinical hypnosis remains a problematic effort for several

reasons. If, on one hand, iconicity is a controversial matter between linguists and semiotic academics (Hiraga, 2005), on the other hand Peircean authors have developed only few concepts about a key notion in this sense - subjectivity - since their interests seem to be much more focused on topics such as mind and cognition (Santaella, 2009; Short, 2007). Maybe the anti-psychologism content of Peirce's work, associated with the cognitive domain of his followers, has set the discussions on subjectivity on a marginal condition, despite contributions of utmost relevance in the matter (Arino, 2007; Colapietro, 1989; Muller & Brent, 2000). Moreover, the empirical and clinical fields of hypnosis have some demands that sometimes are not part of the contemporary Peircean authors' repertoire, as a proposal of care with the other, qualification of the relationship, link and reflexivity (Erickson, 1992; Roustang, 2015).

This setting enables a conceptual vagueness not inconsiderable in this effort of attachment, because there must be much more attachment and refinement in the relationships between a body of thought and the empirical field (Morin, 1991). The iconicity itself, part of the broad range of the communication process, could easily promote this inaccuracy, becoming a sort of *passe-partout* conception of little usefulness to a clinical hypnosis survey. However, similar obstacles do not hinder tracing out potential paths where iconicity is thought in its limitations and potentials regarding the complex comprehension of communication in clinical hypnosis.

In this sense, iconicity cannot be materialized and made objective in logical concepts, disengaged from the whole organic constitution of the subject fabric where it comes alive in the hypnotic communications, like as if one could refer to signs out of the context of every human exchange. That is how subjectivity, as a singular and complex notion (Morin, 1996; 2001; Neubern, 2014), becomes the key point for the purposes approached herein. That is so because in addition to a dialogical concept between opposite pairs, such as the social-individual or subject-collective, it also finds in the emotional its condition as first and fundamental (Schore, 2016), allowing for considerable parallels with the hypoicons. Generally speaking, the two notions put in perspective the self-other separation, and to which extent each subject brings heritage and collective culture from the communities and universes to which he/she belongs.

The intensive and uncertain dynamic of everyday subjective processes, as happens with the hypnotic communication, does not allow for the kind of semiotic survey usually developed in the analysis of images (Jappy, 2010; Bordron, 2011) and literary prose (Hiraga, 2005; Nöth, 2015). Differently from what happens in the hypnotic context, in these cases signs are materially given and the researcher can follow a wide range of interpretations considering their objects and interpretants. Therefore, it can devote a good length of time to a smaller set of signs, let's say fixed, investigating its likely components, since the dynamic of the empirical does not use to provide other variations than those previously presented.

In hypnosis, however, the same interpretant linked to the hypoicons of communication with the therapist is configured to other processes of the history and world experienced by the subject, whose forms have their own dynamics and organizations (Morin, 1996; Neubern, 2013b). The variation

of references that characterize trance and the emergence of different hypnotic phenomena involving considerable richness of subjectivity makes the hypnotic communication a hard domain to this kind of survey, where the material sign is linked to several forms of experience of the subject that are not always accessible to the researcher's thought (Bergman, 2009). Therefore, the semiotic forms are systems with emerging properties not related with each other (Morin, 2001; Neubern, 2014). This allows approaching them to other relevant notions of configuration (Gonzalez Rey, 2011; Merleau-Ponty, 2008). As self-created systems, they lead to the emergence of new signs, created with non-linear links to their material aspect.

Although this perspective is not developed by the Peirce authors (Bergman, 2009; Colapietro, 1989), it is partially corroborated by their ideas that semiotic survey should not be restricted to the mechanical mapping of the signs' elements; rather, it should consider a complex and dynamic reality. At the same time that forms are present in the intersubjective space of communication, they also make up the subject's experience, building the *fields of interpretants* (Jappy, 2013) where similar creation processes could be conceived. This way, the scene viewed in trance can be conceived as a phenomenon (interpretant) that emerges as a point of intersection of many other forms in the world lived by the subject and the context where the hypnotic communication is developed. Even if the hypoicons expressed by the therapist are determinant to its emergence, one should, however, consider the whole ecology of previous forms that are autonomous and constitute the world experience of this singular subject (Morin, 2001).

The semiotic proposal discussed herein points out ways whereby the notion of hypoicons form transcend the dichotomy between patterns and meaning, highlighting a much greater semiotic heterogeneity of the hypnosis' communication fabric than that conceived in contemporary studies. In this sense, the prevalence of secondness in patterns and of thirdness in meanings includes the likelihood that they are constituted by different types of signs. In addition, the complex thought points out an aspect usually neglected in this debate: the creative role of forms as systems (Morin, 2001; Neubern, 2014) that enables the emergence of new semiotic processes in the intersubjective space of communication. This common space, also emphasized by Bergman (2009), provides considerable autonomy to forms regarding subjects, because they are endowed with creation and coordination skills, in addition to intention and control of its key players not only through the new signs added to the relationship, but for the autonomous dimension that characterizes them as systems, and for the potentiality that characterizes the firstness dimension evoked by the hypoicons.

The metaphors, as the sequence of truisms, take on a life of their own in the interactive space because they create new forms that circumvent the key players' intention, and can even wheel around these truisms' subjectivity, in a recursive movement (Morin, 1991). They became a sort of third, given their unique condition as mediators of the relationships between truisms in the construction of trance and the therapeutic change itself. This is something crucial to move on the process.

This is a broad field of study on iconicity and complexity regarding the evocation established between what the the-

rapist shows and what the subject experiences. As a clinical survey, the problem is that a communication process cannot be thought without considering the individual experience of the subjects - a creative and autonomous experience (Gonzalez Rey, 2011). Hypoicons could be conceived as referring to different moments of construction of the survey that sometimes can focus on the other's experience (secondness), other time on the therapist's own experience (firstness) or on the relational context (thirdness). Another feasible possibility is that of conceiving moments of pure experience (firstness), others more related to description and to the interactive game (secondness), and others yet with the theoretical construction and reflexivity over the context (thirdness). However, such processes may seem incomplete if we do not consider the therapist's subjectivity that is a crucial moment in the construction of trance (Neubern, 2013a). It would be a contradiction if any survey on hypoicons disregarded this complex system (Arino, 2007), mainly because of the dimension of feeling evoked by these signs on the relation and experience of subjects, including the therapist him/herself.

On the other hand, just like in complexity (Morin, 1996; 2001; Neubern, 2014), the semiotic subject (Colapietro, 1989) is not monolithic and homogeneous, because it is also a sign (medium) of different communities and wisdoms to which it belongs. However, in complex terms it holds a proposal that includes the private and incommunicable space, as William James would say, without losing sight on this ties of belonging to communities, as Peirce would say (quoted in Colapietro, 1989). Iconicity is highly relevant here, since it is mainly through the first field - of feelings - that such insertions occur, rather than through secondary aspects like social impositions, which do not rebound in this direction. Therefore, the hologram (Morin, 2001) idea, according to which the subject contains a collectivity in him/herself, should be considered in terms of the first dimension that constitutes it, of what can be legitimate to it or not.

In this sense, we could refer to the subject's truths, i.e., truths built from this first dimension permeated by the subjective insertions and exchanges that characterize their *ethos* and identity. Therefore, different expressions that could emerge from a therapeutic process, the hypnotic scenes and phenomena, the appearance of beings, the therapist's theories and techniques somehow recall the different subjective games between this medium *self* and the visible and invisible communities where it takes seat through the firstness. In other words, the question *who am I?* asked by the subject is equivalent to *with whom do I communicate in and from my world?*, considering this communication as something of the order of feeling, that regards its basic and founding links, its identity and its *ethos*.

This would allow hypothesizing significant qualitative differences regarding the legitimacy provided by feeling to the role of this *self-medium* in trance in relation to the communities that represent, for its first truths, and regarding other filiations would tell little or nothing about its *ethos*. At the same that this *self-medium* represents a community that can learn how to reconnect with its roots in the *ethos*, its condition as active, creative subject with capacity of decision and negotiation (Morin, 1996), playing an outstanding role in the hypnotic process, both to the patient and to the therapist. In this light, it may open possibilities to clarify the debate between dissi-



mulation and legitimacy in trance (Midol, 2010) such as, for the therapist, in the decision of a theoretical school which can be close or far from his/her first references.

Another point related to iconicity is the contradiction strongly perceived in the hypnotic communication and in human communication itself. What is shown to symbolically resemble something (metaphors), what is effectively drawn to make it understood (diagrams), which seems to be obvious for the qualitative similarity (image) is what reaches the deepest elements of human experience. This similitude, sometimes repetitive and apparently nonsense in the hypnotic communication, seems to favor the changes of the *self* reference that characterize the emergence of trance. The obvious, simple and somehow infantile content of hypoicons seems to enable this deviation of the *self* deeply constituted and crossed by the symbolic and rational production, in order to promote the emergence of processes where firstness plays a core role. It is like as if, paraphrasing Morin (2005), the complexity of human subjectivity, mostly unconscious, was accessed by the simplicity, sometimes childish, represented by the hypoicons.

This way, iconicity promotes feasible therapeutic paths to the usual mismatching in clinical demands between the *self*, in its ways of thinking and reading the world, and the many unconscious processes of experience. The simplicity found in it is a sort of invitation for the subject to get rid of the weak condition of control and imposition over the *self*, towards a connection with his/her own *ethos* by means of the feelings. Therefore there is no translation of unconscious contents into the conscious logic of the *self*, but a connection with the *ethos* that refers to the subject's dispositions, resources, sufferings, links, ruptures and possibilities of building/fulfilling destiny. In this sense, we could conceive the concept of an inner wisdom present in hypnosis (Erickson & Rossi, 1979) and in other traditions (Nathan, 2004; Rambelli, 2013).

Finally, the simple way of showing that characterizes hypoicons allows the access to the complex universe of the subject's worlds, where individual experience is inhabited by collective beings and wisdoms (Morin, 1996; 2001; Nathan, 2004). This places the hypnotic communication as an interchange between worlds, i.e., a process where key players interact as subjects, but also as mediums of the collectivities they represent. The firstness present here recalls what is on the baseline of the therapist's subjectivity, to what comes *first* in his/her human constitution, which predates even the construction of his/her *self* and to which he/she belongs but that also belongs to him/her (*ethos*). And it is from this world that therapists draw the material to resemble what is also *first* in the other, without any intention to control or manipulate that other, but just touch it in a gesture of deep respect to his/her way of being, or as some may say (Neubern, 2013a) a touch between communities of souls.

### Final Remarks

The considerations up to here allow an analogy where iconicity in hypnotic communication would be like the violin strings that make other instruments vibrate in the same tuning,

composing harmony and melody in the individuals' processes of life. What exists in the vibration of a music instrument seems to reverberate, by similarity, on the structure of the other instruments that also create, from their own dynamic, the sounds that make up the musical harmony. This comparison seems to be pertinent to the radicality of the clinic of *showing* in Erickson's (Erickson & Rossi, 1979) hypnosis based on the idea of iconicity, where the therapist evokes several possibilities of experiences during the trance grounded on his/her differences in face of the other that, as the music enjoyer, dives into his/her own experience and finds his/her *ethos*. It also regards human processes of the everyday subliminal influence regarding moral (teaching through example), ethics (contemplating the beauty) and human and animal imitation-based learning. In these processes, the feeling evoked by iconicity play a core role.

Similar richness of phenomena brings about the need for gathering semiotics (Jappy, 2013; Nöth, 2015) and complexity (Morin, 2001; Neubern, 2013a) – two lines of thought capable of profitably supplementing one another in the pursuit for broader understanding of the hypnotic communication. Although this gathering implies many risks, it is necessary because current approaches are far from a more pertinent, broader and deeper understanding of this field (Midol, 2010; Neubern, 2013b). This way, semiotic could offer greatly relevant materiality to the clinical research, through the notion of sign that allows differentiated approximation with the empirical (filling in a large gap of complex thinking), and overcome the dichotomy and qualification of the processes of feeling. The complexity, in turn, provides important concepts to understand this process, mainly regarding the experience of the key players through notions such as system, subject and subjectivity - topics that are not always deeply approached in semiotics, but that are crucial for the survey about hypnosis. Despite the wide range of probabilities ensuing from that gathering, further studies are required to advance this understanding in such a complex and instable field as hypnotic communication (Midol, 2010).

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