

## ERICKSONIAN HYPNOSIS AND THE ESTHETICS OF CHARLES PEIRCE: FEELINGS, MUSEMENT AND THERAPEUTIC RECONFIGURATION

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**ABSTRACT.** The present work seeks to discuss the relations between ericksonian hypnosis and the esthetics of Charles S. Peirce (1839-1914) to understand the role of feelings and esthetic admiration present in hypnotherapeutic processes and its relations with therapeutic reconfigurations. With this in mind, the basic concepts of Peirce's work were presented such as sign, semiosis, habit, its phenomenological categories and how esthetics is placed in relation to the other Normative Sciences. Milton H. Erickson (1901-1980) and the characteristics of his practice that underpin the approach of ericksonian hypnosis were briefly introduced. Two cases of Milton Erickson are presented below to illustrate the theoretical development. The study elaborates on how hypnotic communication promotes a favorable context for esthetic admiration and *Musement* amidst the trance experience and how it can restrict the influence of rational processes on its ongoing interactions. By exploring the role of feeling in the therapeutic reconfigurations of the cases, the formation process of habits of feeling is discussed as esthetic ideals that direct the reconfiguration of self-control, which consequently forms and sustains new habits of conduct. Finally, it develops on the aspects of drama and existential matters that arise midst the cases' analysis and the possible theoretical implications if they are to be considered constitutive dimensions of the subject.

**Keywords:** Hypnosis; trance; Charles Peirce.

## HIPNOSE ERICKSONIANA E ESTÉTICA DE CHARLES PEIRCE: SENTIMENTO, MUSEMENT E RECONFIGURAÇÃO TERAPÊUTICA

**RESUMO.** O presente trabalho busca discutir as relações entre a hipnose ericksoniana e a estética de Charles S. Peirce (1839-1914) para compreender o papel do sentimento e admiração estética presente nos processos hipnoterápicos e sua relação com as reconfigurações terapêuticas. Com esse intuito, são apresentados os conceitos básicos da obra de Peirce, como signo, semiose e hábito, suas categorias fenomenológicas e como a estética se situa perante as demais Ciências Normativas. São introduzidas, brevemente, a figura de Milton H. Erickson (1901-1980) e as características de sua prática que embasam a abordagem de hipnose ericksoniana. Em seguida, são apresentados dois casos de Milton Erickson para ilustração do desenvolvimento teórico. É apresentado o modo como a comunicação hipnótica promove um contexto favorável à admiração estética e ao *musement* pela experiência de transe e como pode restringir a influência de processos racionais sobre as interações em andamento. Ao explorar o papel do sentimento nas reconfigurações terapêuticas dos casos, discute-se o processo de formação dos hábitos de

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sentimento enquanto ideais estéticas que direcionam a reconfiguração do autocontrole, que, por consequência, forma e sustenta novos hábitos de conduta. Por último, são desenvolvidos os aspectos de drama e questões existenciais que surgem em meio à análise dos casos e possíveis implicações teóricas caso consideradas dimensões constitutivas do sujeito.

**Palavras-chave:** Hipnose; transe; Charles Peirce.

## **HIPNOSIS ERICKSONIANA Y ESTÉTICA DE CHARLES PEIRCE: SENTIMIENTO, MUSEMENT Y RECONFIGURACIÓN TERAPÉUTICA**

**RESUMEN.** El presente trabajo busca discutir las relaciones entre la hipnosis ericksoniana y la estética de Charles S. Peirce (1839-1914) para comprender el papel del sentimiento y la admiración estética presentes en los procesos hipnoterapéuticos y su relación con las reconfiguraciones terapéuticas. Con esto en mente, los conceptos básicos de la obra de Peirce fueron presentados como signo, semiosis, hábito, sus categorías fenomenológicas y cómo la estética se coloca por delante de las otras Ciencias Normativas. Se introdujo brevemente la figura de Milton H. Erickson (1901-1980) y las características de su práctica que sustentan el enfoque de la hipnosis ericksoniana. A continuación se presentan dos casos de Milton Erickson para ilustrar el desarrollo teórico. Explica cómo la comunicación hipnótica promueve un contexto favorable para la admiración estética y el *Musement* para la experiencia del trance y cómo puede restringir la influencia de los procesos racionales en las interacciones en curso. Al explorar el papel del sentimiento en las reconfiguraciones terapéuticas de los casos, el proceso de formación de hábitos de sentimiento se discute como ideales estéticos que dirigen la reconfiguración del autocontrol, lo que consecuentemente forma y sostiene nuevos hábitos de conducta. Por último, se desarrolla sobre los aspectos de dramatismo y cuestiones existenciales que surgen en medio del análisis de los casos y las posibles implicaciones teóricas si se consideran las dimensiones constitutivas del tema.

**Palabras clave:** Hipnosis; transe; Charles Peirce.

### **Introduction**

In the last two decades, there has been a considerable revival of hypnosis as a therapeutic proposal; however, as a field of research, many studies aim to measure the effectiveness of hypnotic techniques (Ardigo 2016), subjecting them to an allopathic treatment logic (Mckernan et al., 2018). This perspective, despite popularizing the field, does not contribute to the open questions for the understanding of hypnosis as a therapeutic approach, such as clarifying the nature of the trance experience, how hypnotic communication promotes the onset of the trance experience and how it articulates with the subjective processes that allow the evocation of hypnotic phenomena and what is the subjective constitution implied by its success. The development of these research questions requires a qualitative perspective and a theoretical discussion that recent studies have developed based on the semiotics of Charles Peirce, given his understanding of reality and communicative processes (Neubern, 2021; Neubern & Gonçalves, 2019a, 2019b).

Charles Peirce's semiotics is of great value for the study of hypnotherapy processes because it promotes a detailed understanding of the influence of context and elucidates the

development of therapeutic processes without being restricted to discussions limited to pattern recognition or symbolic meaning (Neubern, 2018, 2021). At the same time, it differentiates feeling from symbolic processes in phenomenological terms and clarifies their role in the weaving of meaning. However, certain deliberative processes of human change present in the context of hypnotherapy demonstrate a central role for feeling as a purpose of action, locating the discussion for understanding these processes more in Peirce's writings on esthetics than in his semiotics.

The purpose of this paper is to discuss the relationship between Ericksonian hypnosis (Erickson, 1980; Erickson & Rossi, 1979; Neubern, 2018) and the esthetics of Charles Peirce (Barrena, 2015; Peirce, 1934; Santaella, 1994), based on the therapeutic reconfigurations arising from two clinical cases of Milton Erickson. To this end, central concepts from the works of Charles Peirce and Milton Erickson will be presented, and they are also situated in contemporary studies. Next, two short clinical cases by Milton Erickson (Erickson, 1980; Zeig, 1980) are presented from the source by the author. The theoretical development follows the cases, bringing reflections about the hypnotic procedures used as a construction of the therapeutic context and elaborating on the role of the qualities of feeling and aesthetic admiration in the processes of therapeutic reconfiguration. Finally, the aspects of drama and existential issues that arise in the therapeutic processes of the cases are highlighted, and the theoretical implications are developed as a possible constitutive dimension of the subject.

It is worth noting that this work is situated alongside other studies (Neubern, 2021; Neubern & Gonçalves, 2019a) as a first approximation between very different fields of study, with a methodology that is still in the process of consolidation. Studies on subjective processes are usually based on the subject's report of their experience as the main axis of legitimization of the knowledge constructed there (Gonzalez Rey, 2020), but this criterion proves to be insufficient in the field of hypnosis. Hypnotherapeutic procedures can involve the evocation or spontaneous manifestation of amnesia and dissociations between different instances of agency (Gallagher, 2020), such as conscious and unconscious, in which different communication pathways are established and do not necessarily translate into a rational understanding of the process (Erickson, 1980). Thus, the subject's account of the experience and the processes experienced may be partial or nonexistent. The construction of information, then, is done based on the signs that constitute the context, the bond, and the exchanges in the therapeutic relationship. Theoretical articulation involves demonstrating the relevance between the interpretation and the signs on which it is based. The presentation of the basic material, the cases, contributes to the debatability (Demo, 2012) of the researcher's interpretations and formulations. The intention is to outline research possibilities, not exclusive determinations, to elucidate the subjective processes that constitute the subject and the interactions that make up the phenomenon of hypnosis in its therapeutic proposal.

## **The Esthetics of Charles Peirce**

In his vast work of pragmatic philosophy, the American philosopher Charles S. Peirce (1839-1914) presents an understanding of reality, the human being, and the construction of meanings based on a solid phenomenology that maintains a perspective of continuity between the phenomena, feelings, and reason. After thirteen years of study, he arrived at three phenomenological categories that cover any and all phenomenon that presents themselves to the mind (Santaella, 1994). Briefly described, *Firstness* refers to the category

of immediate quality, feeling, and evanescence (Peirce, 1934, vol. I, p.183)<sup>4</sup>; *Secondness* is the category of relation, existence, effort, and resistance; and *Thirdness* is the category of mediation, representation, generality, and system (Peirce, 1983).

Signs, any phenomenon that represents something to a mind, organize themselves with elements of the three categories, and can prioritize one of them, and their action in the mind is called semiosis. As a result of the process of interpretation, the mind generates a new sign, called the interpretant, which is the synthesis of what the mind understands to be the object represented by the sign, whether real or not (Peirce, 1934, vol. I, pp. 171-172)<sup>5</sup>. But although Peirce is more studied by his semiotic theory, it makes up only the third of the normative sciences that were erected with his phenomenology, among them, esthetics, ethics, and logic (semiotic).

Defining the concept of normative sciences was not an easy task (Peirce, 1905). Peirce sometimes informs that "normative Science treats of the laws of the relation of phenomena to ends; that is, it treats of phenomena in their *secondness* [...]"; at other times, it is a science that distinguishes "[...] what ought to be from what ought not to be" (Peirce, 1998, p. 259). However, some of its scholars conclude that "[...] the normative sciences are those that seek to clarify the general, universal, and necessary laws that govern the relation of phenomena to ends that are not immanent to those phenomena" (Barrena, 2015, p. 122).

In this categorization, esthetics is located as the first normative science grounded in phenomenology. Esthetics, as defined by Peirce (1934, vol. I, pp. 79-80)<sup>6</sup>, is the "[...] science of ideals, or of that which is objectively admirable, without any ulterior reason." This concept corresponds mainly to the dimension of firstness, since it studies qualities and feelings to understand their relations with the purpose of phenomena. In this sense, the aesthetic study is not equivalent to the science of beauty or taste, since its object of study, the immediate qualities, are prior to judgments of value or individual preferences (Peirce, 1934; Silva, 2017).

To discuss, then, the influence of immediate qualities, Peirce (1934, Vol. V, pp. 82-84)<sup>7</sup> refers to the admirable, the quality that attracts and invites the mind to contemplate it. According to Sheriff (1994, p. 72), in aesthetic experience, the mind perceives the signs not connected with events, actual existents, or acts of reason, but as signs of the immediate, unanalyzable, inexplicable, unintellectual consciousness that runs in a continuous stream through our lives". Taste and preference, therefore, do not precede aesthetic admiration, but are shaped by it, as certain qualities become more attractive than others (Silva, 2017).

Admiration gives rise to admirable ideals that subsidize the other normative sciences, ethics, and logic (Peirce, 1934, vol. II, p. 117)<sup>8</sup>. From this perspective, Santaella (1994) refers to Peirce's esthetics as a discipline focused on the formation of habits of feeling. However, the concept of habit differs from the notion of repetitive activity of common sense; habit, in the Peircean work, concerns a feature present in every phenomenon that allows it to organize itself in unfinished, interspersed, and evolutionary systems that govern some form of tendency (Nöth, 2016). Habits, in this sense, constitute mutable mental laws that determine the exercises of being as a whole in their potential contexts. Considering the

<sup>4</sup> CP 1.356-357 in the conventional format of reference to the *Collected Papers* of Peirce (1934), containing the abbreviation of the title of the work, volume number, point, and paragraph numbers.

<sup>5</sup> CP 1.339.

<sup>6</sup> CP 1.191.

<sup>7</sup> CP 5.130.

<sup>8</sup> CP 2.199.

ability to attract admirable ideals, habits of feeling influence other habits of conduct and thought, so that they are directed towards this ideal.

There is a set of habits, reflective capacities that the mind develops throughout life experience, responsible for the review, formation, and abandonment of habits of conduct: self-consciousness, self-criticism, and self-control (Colapietro, 2014; Silva, 2017, 2018). In terms of the subject's relationship with external reality, self-control is crucial for fulfilling the function of managing habits of conduct in accordance with the admirable ideals of the subject and with whom they want to become (Colapietro 2016, 2017). To this end, self-control can reach a level of maturity in which it is responsible for maintaining its evolutionary process and now cultivates aesthetic ideals (Peirce, 1934, vol. V, pp. 82-84)<sup>9</sup>. It is from this perspective that Peirce understood the task of the three normative sciences to be to ascertaining how Feeling, Conduct, and Thought ought to be controlled supposing them to be subject *in a measure*, and only in a measure, to self-control, exercised by means of self-criticism, and the purposive formation of habit, as common sense tells us they are in a measure controllable" (Peirce, 1910)<sup>10</sup>.

In the text *A neglected argument in the reality of God*, 1908, Peirce (Vol. VI, p. 311)<sup>11</sup> describes a form of disposition of the mind in the face of phenomena which he calls *Musement*, a daydream that takes various forms, either of aesthetic contemplation, or unreasonable imaginary creation, speculation of ideas without any purpose. An unruly activity except for the freedom of the instances of the being to exercise their abilities among the three phenomenological universes. *Musement* covers the aesthetic experience as described by Sheriff (1994) and describes a playful relationship with the qualities that present themselves, from which an admirable ideal for the subject can emerge (Silva, 2018).

This work relates the *musement* process to a trance experience. Hypnotic communication can promote changes in ego-world relational references that constitute the trance experience and provide a conducive context for aesthetic contemplation. In this field, Ericksonian hypnosis (Erickson, 1980; Erickson & Rossi, 1979; Zeig, 1980) stands out for the way that it adapts to the subject's singularity.

## Ericksonian hypnosis

Milton Erickson (1901-1980) was an American psychiatrist who stood out for his innovations and mastery of hypnosis, disentangled from other, more rigid theoretical models of the time (Neubern, 2018). His particular form of hypnotherapy was named under a new category as naturalistic hypnosis, since it understood both trance and a natural phenomenon of the human being, and his practice prioritized the use of the subject's resources for effective therapeutic change (Erickson, 1980, 1994; Erickson & Rossi, 1979). His cases included a mild range of demands involving physiological, subjective, and relational issues (O'Hanlon & Hexum, 1990). Thus, Erickson was of interest to many researchers because of his indirect communication, use of metaphors, storytelling, and often enigmatic tasks in his therapeutic practice. Ericksonian hypnosis became a school of psychotherapy after Erickson's death through his disciples as a way to spread and develop his master's knowledge, but Erickson never intended to found a school bearing his name (Zeig 1985).

<sup>9</sup> CP 5.130.

<sup>10</sup> MS 655. Reference to Peirce's personal manuscripts containing the number of the respective manuscript according to R. Robin.

<sup>11</sup> CP 6.452.

His hypnotic suggestions were based on rapport, a sense of understanding and mutual interest between therapist and patient (Erickson & Rossi, 1979), developed considering the singularity of each case. They also stemmed from their principle of utilization, in which the whole presence of the subject, their gestures, language used, and modes of expression were closely observed, as they could be used therapeutically. Thus, they followed the logic of the subject's functioning and allowed for the emergence and evocation of various hypnotic phenomena such as dissociation, temporal distortion, amnesia, anesthesia, and hallucination of the physical senses (Erickson, 1980).

At various points in his work, Erickson offers reflections on how the unconscious thinks, often referring to it as another form of powerful rationality underlying consciousness, full of resources acquired through life experience (Erickson, 1980). In this sense, he sees the state of trance as a field in which these potentials and learning can emerge or be evoked through indirect communication to contribute to therapeutic change, provided that the logic of the subject's functioning is taken into account (Erickson & Rossi, 1979).

However, his understanding of the unconscious and the state of trance was never systematized in a precise theory, nor did Erickson show interest in doing so (Neubern, 2018), creating conceptual problems for the field. Neubern (2021) understands hypnosis as a phenomenon consisting of two simultaneous processes: the trance experience and hypnotic communication. The trance experience refers to changes in the references of time, space, otherness, cause, and matter that situate consciousness in reality. This shift attenuates dominant conscious processes and allows other processes, usually inhibited in the waking state, to emerge. Hypnotic communication, on the other hand, refers to the communicative processes involved in the evocation, conduct and maintenance of the trance experience, whether internal, such as the deliberation of comparing or rejecting suggestions and the production of images, sounds, feelings, or external, as the form of transmission of suggestions, taking into account context and technique.

For an understanding of the subject's processes in a hypnotherapy proposal, one is a configurational perspective (Neubern, 2021; Neubern & Gonçalves, 2019a), in which the subjective, relational, cultural, vital, and bodily dimensions of the subject are considered in dynamic, interspersed, and unfinished systems. These systems are organized at different hierarchical levels, constituting configurations with a certain degree of autonomy and their own operating logic, but accessible to certain processes. Consequently, the therapeutic process can be conceived as a process of reconfiguration, articulating processes to propose new forms of organization and interaction.

Considering the systemic organization of the configurations in relation to Peirce's pragmatism, this work suggests the understanding of configuration as a habit, due to its dynamic character and constant exchange with reality, through which it develops a certain autonomy. Perhaps the therapeutic process can be considered as a reconfiguration of habits, in which the context provides several signs for the formation of new interpretations, taking into account the three universes of experience.

Next, we describe two of Erickson's cases (Erickson, 1980; Zeig, 1980) in which subjects have no conscious understanding of the therapeutic reconfigurations that have occurred. Hypnotic suggestions occur predominantly at the level of firstness and feeling. The theoretical discussion describes the unique context of each case and articulates therapeutic reconfiguration as a process of choosing aesthetic ideals that affect the subject's conduct and habits.

## Case 1 – Crystal Balls

The patient suffered from anxiety neurosis with severe depressive reactions and addictive patterns. During sessions, she discussed her problems intellectually without making changes. She did not tolerate her living and work situations, but she refused opportunities for change. She became more demanding, demanding that Erickson force her to do the things she could not do.

After many sessions, she focused her thoughts on the idea that if she could get one of the things she wanted, she would get the others. She was immediately hypnotized and, in a somnambulant state, instructed to see a series of crystal balls. Each one would represent a significant experience in her life. She would study them, comparing and noticing the continuity of various elements. From this study, a constellation of ideas would emerge, formulated without her realizing it. This formulation would manifest in another larger ball in which she would be comfortable, desirable, and happy in some future activity.

She spent about an hour absorbed, studying the hallucinatory scenes and searching for other crystal balls. She found them and gave them her full attention, eagerly describing the scenes.

In the big ball, there was a wedding that would actually take place in three months. She described the ceremony, the reception, and the dance. She was interested in the dress she was wearing, but described it only as beautiful. She watched the dance, identified some men she danced with, and named the one who asked her out. She commented on how happy he looked and the difference between his appearance now and that in marriage.

She was instructed to keep everything she saw in her subconscious and to have amnesia when she woke up. It was further explained that this would provide a tremendous motivational force through which all her understandings could be used constructively. She was then awakened and given a post-hypnotic suggestion to continue the amnesia.

There were two more sessions in which she just wanted to be hypnotized and remember the marriage experience in her subconscious, and then she ended the therapy.

Three months later, she walked into the office without an appointment because she felt she owed an explanation about the wedding, but she did not know why. She explained that the bride and groom were her lifelong friends and that their families were close. Months earlier, after a session, she felt the need to dedicate herself to this marriage. She was invited to be a bridesmaid and decided to make her own dress. So, she agreed to be promoted to have better times and took an apartment in the city to avoid the traffic.

In describing the wedding, she was startled when Erickson asked if Ed had asked her out. She danced with Ed, but found him to be below her expectations. However, she accepted another man's proposal.

She said, "I was a pretty sick girl when I first came to see you; I was horribly mixed up, and I'm grateful to you for getting me straightened out in time so that I could get ready for the wedding." She had no awareness that her preparations for the wedding constituted her recovery. She is happily married and the mother of three children (Erickson, 1980, Vol. IV, pp. 410-412).

## Case 2 – The Hungry Tiger

Now, a second case involving cancer. A doctor called me and said

I have a patient at Good Samaritan Hospital. She is 52 years old. She has a master's degree. She is very intelligent, very well read, and she has a marvellous sense of humor. But she has got less than three months to live and she suffers pain constantly. I can give her a double shot of morphine and

Demerol and Percodan, all at the same time, plus nine grains of sodium amytal. It doesn't even make her drowsy, she suffers so much pain. But she can sit in a wheelchair and an ambulance can bring her out to your office. And the ambulance driver can push her into your office. Will you see what you can do with hypnosis?

The ambulance driver pushed her in through this door and into my office there (Erickson points to the side door of his office). She came into the office. I was 70 years old, and my hair was essentially this color — it has been about this color for 15 years. She looked at me and said, “Sonny, do you really think that your hypnotic words will so alter my body when powerful chemicals have no effect on it?”

I said, “Madam, as I look at your eyes, the pupils are dilating and contracting steadily, and your facial muscles are quivering. So I know you are suffering constant pain — constant, stabbing, pulsating pain. I can see it with my eyes. Now tell me, Madam, if you saw a lean, hungry tiger in the next room, slowly walking into the room and eyeing you hungrily and licking its chops, how much pain would you feel?”

She said, “I wouldn't feel any under those circumstances. Well, my goodness. I don't feel any pain now. May I take that tiger back to the hospital with me?” I said, “Certainly, but I will have to tell your doctor.” She said, “But don't tell the nurses. I want to have some fun with the nurses. Every time they ask me if I am having pain, I am going to tell them, look under the bed. If the tiger is still there, I haven't got a bit of pain. Any 52-year-old woman who starts calling me “sonny” has a sense of humor. So I made use of that (Zeig, 1980, pp. 188-189).

## Theoretical Discussion

The theoretical discussion is grounded in clinical interpretations based on the Ericksonian approach (Neubern, 2018, 2021; Erickson & Rossi, 1979; Zeig, 1980) and the work of Charles Peirce (Peirce, 1934, 1998). To elucidate the subjective processes that contributed to therapeutic reconfigurations, an analysis of hypnotic communications must take into account the context in which they occur and the relationship between subject and therapist. In the first case, the patient had already been undergoing hypnotherapy for an unspecified number of sessions, without presenting any urgent problems, and expressed a desire to be hypnotized, but with the intention of avoiding and not dealing with the failures of her self-control. In the second case, the patient did not know the therapist, was in constant pain, and was referred by her physician without disclosing any previous experience with hypnosis.

In the second case, *rappport* develops quickly when the patient meets an elderly doctor in a wheelchair, just like herself. However, it is when Erickson describes the processes going on in her body and the pain she is feeling that the *rappport* is consolidated and allows the suggestion to take effect. It would be wrong to ignore this development of the relationship and to attribute the relief of pain to a mere diversion of attention or to the merit of the suggestion in isolation from the interactions that preceded it. This would subject the hypnotic influence to a strictly mechanistic and concrete logic, ignoring the unexpectedness of being recommended to a sick doctor, the processes triggered by the image of her doctor in a wheelchair as her peer, or the knowledge that Erickson gained not only from clinical experience but from his own experience with chronic pain (Zeig, 1985).

*Rappport* processes allow for the subsequent reconfiguration of habits. For educational purposes, this process can be discussed in terms of subjective and vital dimensions, although the experience itself inevitably involves both and may prioritize one of the



dimensions (Neubern, 2018; Neubern & Gonçalves, 2019a). In case 1, the reconfiguration occurs mainly in the subjective dimension, where self-control habits undergo a necessary transformation in light of their goals. In case 2, the most significant change occurs in the processes of the vital dimension, the suspension of constant pain. Case 1, however, includes processes of the vital dimension that are essential to the reconfiguration, such as the actions taken as a result of the events experienced after therapy, just as Case 2 is filled with the future perspective of humor and symbolic relationships in the figure of the tiger.

The patient in case 1 had already rationally identified her behavioral patterns, desires, frustrations, and vicious cycles, but she did not make decisions or implement consistent changes. In addition, she attributed to the therapist the responsibility for initiating important movements for her own well-being, disregarding her autonomy. As she began to demonstrate a more consolidated habit of change - if I do one thing, I will be able to do the others - Erickson constructed a hypnotic context in which the patient became enchanted with a possible future that sentimentally justified the reconfiguration of habits. The process of admiring her future image and the experiential play between sensations, visualizations, and emotions can be seen as a demonstration of Peirce's *musément*, establishing a habit of feeling that began to guide the reconfiguration of self-control habits.

*Musement*, as the contemplation of the admirable aesthetic (Peirce, 1934; Sheriff, 1994), satisfactorily describes the experience of crystal balls, in which the patient encounters a scene of her own creation and establishes a relationship of deep admiration and indescribable attraction for that moment. The feelings and singular qualities present in the scene constitute an admirable ideal, latent possibilities of a future that provide a direction for the reconfiguration of her self-control and present themselves without being accompanied by a logical and rational argument.

Thus, attracted by this ideal, as an initial part of the reconfiguration process, the capacities of self-criticism and self-consciousness also play their role, showing the self-control how much it has failed regarding the subject's own ideals and the need for change (Colapietro, 2017). When the patient compares herself in terms of beauty, happiness, and sociability with her image from the hypnotic scene, unconscious processes of intense review of her self-control occur because, as Erickson describes, despite intense rational self-criticism, no change occurred, demonstrating rigid self-control. According to Colapietro (2017, p. 16), "[...] for deliberative agents (self-control, self-criticism and self-consciousness) to fail to address in a repeated, conscientious manner both *who* they desire to become and [...] *what* they feel to be inherently admirable means they fall short of being fully deliberative agents."

However, supported by the trance experience and a clear image of who one wants to become, the habits of self-control are reconfigured to organize the subject's conduct to bring them closer to what they admire and believe will make them achieve. This process, however, is not conscious at any time; it is understood by the patient as a mere consequence of an intense desire to devote herself to her friend's wedding. For this reason, the reconfiguration occurs without conflict with the habits of rational logic that incapacitated the patient. The action itself is based on and relates more to feeling than to any previous rationality of the subject that may have distorted and suppressed her self-control (Peirce, 1934).

The patient in case 2 did not have a long trance experience like the patient in case 1, but *musément* is observed in the way she interacts with the figure of the tiger, with possible reactions of the nurses to what she might say. A considerable part of the reconfiguration is related to an aspect that turns out to be essential for the subject, that is, humor, which allows

her to exercise once again, in everyday life, striking characteristics of her personality. In this sense, the tiger, an exotic and dangerous animal, allows the patient to fantasize about the social interactions that it can provide in a way that is consistent with the absence of pain that it partially represents.

However, none of the patients demonstrated the ability to report the processes that facilitated their therapeutic reconfiguration. The patient in case 2 saw her pain suddenly cease after listening to Erickson's speech, without knowing that it was a hypnotic suggestion or any subsequent explanation. The patient in case 1 presented complete amnesia of the trance experiences described, and at the end of her last visit, she stated that she believed Erickson had straightened her out before the end of therapy, even though the motivation for change, the goals, the plans and their execution came from her own resources. Thus, a proposal to study these cases using a methodology whose legitimacy of information is based solely on the subject's conscious and rational understanding of his or her experience would be unlikely to yield reliable knowledge of the subjective processes involved. Concerning hypnotherapy, certain reconfiguring processes can take place at a subjective and vital level, without giving rise to certain habits of self-consciousness, and thus without the participation of rational instances that would subject the experience to their respective operational logics.

### **Hypnotic communication**

Although sometimes directive, hypnotic communication in these cases uses the subject's own resources to provide experiences in which these resources interact and organize themselves into a logic of functioning that is beneficial to the subject's autonomy. In Case 1, the patient was instructed to visualize the crystal balls, but they would be filled with events from her life that her unconscious presented as significant. These moments of experience were directed to constitute the constellation of ideas that would later manifest, but the formulation was the patient's own work. In this way, hypnotic communication seems to minimally establish the conditions for interaction between different instances of the subject, providing them with an adequate context for expressing and constructing important habits of feeling, taking into account their existential trajectory and the qualities they desire for themselves. As a countermeasure, amnesia restricts the experience to the unconscious, avoiding the interference of self-frustrating and self-destructive habits (Colapietro, 2000) that perpetuate the patterns of dependence mentioned at the beginning of the case.

About case 2, the hypnotic communication establishes a rapport and suggests the intersection of two fields: the pain experienced in the face of imminent death from cancer and the absence of pain one experiences while defenselessly standing face to face with a deadly predator, the hungry tiger, which sees her as food. The suggestion is interpretable in context, but the icon-rich description locates the subject's senses in the scene constructed along with the process of interpreting the suggestion (Neubern & Gonçalves, 2019a), in this case, arousing the habit of anesthesia in the face of danger. The reconfiguration stands out when the overlap of the two experiences is synthesized in a habit, so that the absence of pain prevails, involving both the imminent death from cancer, represented by the tiger, and the possibility of interacting with others in a way that makes sense to her, through humor and joy. It can be considered that self-control, from this perspective, begins to work effectively in favor of the role the patient wants to play in life and the ideals she admires.

It is possible to say that hypnotic communication, due to its iconicity (Neubern, 2021; Neubern & Gonçalves, 2019), allows the construction of a context favorable to an aesthetic experience (Sheriff, 1994), with less obstruction from rational and conscious instances.

Indirect communication channels the interpretative process, offering it ways to succeed, but without imposing on the subject what to conclude from this experience, but rather leading them to encounter possibilities of meaning. In this scenario, a musement relationship with the experience becomes viable for the subject, in which feelings, present signs, and deep instances of oneself interact more through affinity and admiration of their qualities than through intellectually constructed habits. As a result, habits of feeling can emerge that will affect other habits in a process of reconfiguration. Even trance experiences that are apparently unrelated to the subject can influence their habits, as the qualities that emerge and prove admirable or not are processed in reflections that select them as the ideal for some form of conduct.

Two interconnected points of discussion stand out in the reconfiguration processes illustrated: 1) the narrative imagination, in which the subject sees themselves playing a role in a drama (Colapietro, 2017); and 2) the existential questions that pose themselves to self-criticism, self-consciousness, and self-control. Both cases involve, at some point, the imaginative projection of the subject into a future scene in which they act according to their aesthetic ideals. The experience of the crystal ball constructs a narrative of lived moments that progresses to a future action, slowly contributing in terms of feeling to a proposal that organizes them in an attractive and coherent way. In the second case, the absence of pain and the presence of the tiger lead the patient to fantasize about relationships in which she plays a fun and ideal role according to her own criteria.

In this sense, the scene presents a kind of existential drama in which the subject finds itself playing a role that is clearly endowed with admirable qualities, which activate the reflective faculties at a basic sentimental level, so that they interpret whether or not there is a correspondence between the qualities envisioned and those currently presented by the subject. This recognition between the narrative of the ideal subject and that of the current subject echoes in existential questions about the meaning of life, identity, the role one plays in relationships, and the story they want for themselves as the protagonist. The feeling resulting from the resonance with the existential questions and the distance between the imagined and real roles contributes to the formation of the habit of feeling, which provides the admirable ideal with purposes and goals of achievement. However, its influence on decision-making is unconscious; that is, it does not take place through logical and intellectual considerations, but through habits of feeling that involve right and wrong, sense or nonsense, attraction or repulsion, which subsidize interpretations of various experiences of relations with the external.

Self-control, which is responsible for coordinating habits that lead the subject to its goals, is both directed and influenced by habits of feeling and, when sufficiently mature, cultivates an aesthetic ideal (Peirce, 1934) that nourishes it in a self-evolutionary cycle. The existential drama, or the narrative of the self, can be understood as one of the components of the aesthetic ideal, capable of mobilizing habits of feeling by locating admirable qualities about the subject's existence in the world. In a state of trance, however, the communicative processes of the subject's instances are more clearly illustrated, in a context of contemplation with less interference from dominant rational processes.

This perspective can contribute to understanding the therapeutic potential of hypnotic regression and progression techniques (Erickson, 1980, 1994; Neubern, 2018) in terms of their ability to work on identity processes, belonging, and roles played in social relationships. Consequently, the influence of these techniques on the reconfiguration process is not limited to an intellectual parallelism regarding what the subject was, is, and will be, or an attempt to

identify unwanted characteristics, but can promote a contemplative field in which the subject, through affinity, chooses qualities that they wish to share and forms habits of feeling about their trajectory and conduct. Thus, they provide fundamental conditions for the reconfiguration of self-control, allowing the search for ways to make the subject a representative sign of their ideals, without necessarily centering the reflective and therapeutic processes on rational or conscious dimensions.

## Final considerations

The trance experience can facilitate a *Musement* experience for the subject. Hypnotic communication can suggest the necessary context and ways in which different instances of the subject can interact and communicate qualities in a protected way. The communication can be complex, involving several senses and communicating or exercising ideals of conduct, allowing the formation of new habits of feeling, as well as checking and maintaining self-control. This process seems to benefit from the temporal distortion added to the therapeutic context, since it allows the qualitative communication and the reflective abilities the appropriate time for a deep exchange, without the possibility of interruption, as happens in everyday environments.

Self-control, like the other reflective faculties, shows an aspect of its functioning that is not limited to thinking, organizing both a vital dimension of experience in exchange with habits of physiological logic, but in which it forms subtle, abstract habits that govern which admirable, attractive qualities will be used to base habits of conduct. This process may be related to the subject's own affinity with the qualities that attract them and is part of the maturation cycle of the reflective faculties. This aspect is still maintained in the aesthetic dimension, since it establishes coherence between the feelings that underlie the habits of different systems of the subject according to the cultivated aesthetic ideals and does not involve moral judgment or logical argumentation. Similarly, questions arise about the instances of agency (Gallagher, 2020) and the extent of their relationship to self-control in habits of conduct. Peirce (1910) described the formation of habits of self-control as a purposeful exercise, but the purpose for change may be conflicting between different instances of agency, and the extent to which these affect habits of conduct requires further clarification.

On this point, it must be emphasized that the intention of this work is far from disregarding conscious and intellectual instances; however, Peirce's pragmatic perspective allows us to locate and distinguish the influence of feeling processes from thinking processes that are constantly fused into categories related to the symbolic (Neubern & Gonçalves, 2019a). Logical argumentation allows for the growth and coherence of reason, but it constantly fails in its goals by ignoring the feelings that underlie habits of conduct or thoughts.

Peirce adds that "men many times fancy that they act from reason when, in point of fact, the reasons they attribute to themselves are nothing but excuses which unconscious instinct invents to satisfy the teasing "whys" of the ego" (Peirce, 1934, vol. I, p. 346)<sup>12</sup>. The passage deals with how certain distorted logical constructions prove convincing to others and instances of oneself; however, such constructions are superficial phenomena of hidden feelings and desires that yield little to conscious argumentation, but are accessible to communicative processes of a first dimension. Taking esthetics as a starting point involves

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<sup>12</sup> CP 1.631.

a point that has been little explored in Peirce's work and requires caution in theoretical articulation so as not to contradict the content of his work as a whole. It does, however, allow us to clarify the role of phenomena of firstness, such as feelings, in the processes of habit formation.

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