

Sign and Aesthetic Systems
 (With an Application to Brancusi's Semiotic Aesthetics)

Semiotic aesthetics, even if parallel to numerical aesthetics, was developed mainly as an analytical method. In Morris's attempt, terms such as *icon* and *index*, sometimes *symbol* (but not in the sense Peirce introduced), appear here and there. Cassirer and Langer worked on the aesthetics of symbolic forms, while others, primarily attracted by the dyadic philosophy expressed in de Saussure's concept, attempted applications now included in structuralist-aesthetic or semiological approaches.

I. Semiotic aesthetics must define, in specific terms, the aesthetic state (AS) and aesthetic value (AV). That is, it has to render explicit the relation between the repertory—considered on the macro-aesthetic level—and the interpretant, and to define aesthetic value as dependent upon the way signs participate in the aesthetic object. According to Bense (1971), these two principle aspects might be expressed through:

$$A S_{sem} = F(\text{Interpretant, Repertory}) \quad (\alpha)$$

$$A V_{sem} = F(\text{supericonicity}) \quad (\beta)$$

At the basis of this attempt is Peirce's representation of the sign. Let us add here two of his statements:

"Esthetics, therefore, although I have terribly neglected it, appears to be possibly the first indispensable propedeutic to logic, and the logic of esthetics to be a distinct part of the science of logic that ought not be omitted." (2.199)

"Logic, in its sense is, as I believe I have shown, only another name of semiotic, the quasinecessary, or formal doctrine of signs." (2. 227)

If so, then

- a) semiotic aesthetics is only part of semiotics in general;
- b) semiotic aesthetics can contribute to the progress ("indispensable propedeutic") of semiotics in general.

These are, however, only matters of principle. Recalling now the definition which I (1976) gave to analytical, synthetic and generative semiotics, we can observe that the aesthetic-semiotic problematic places itself in this perspective.

$$\begin{aligned} S_A : S_R &\rightarrow C, \text{ with } C \subset S_n, \text{ so that } n > 0 \\ S_S : C &\rightarrow S_R, \text{ with } S_R \text{ the repertory, as a given non-empty set} \\ S_G : C' &\rightarrow S_A, \text{ so that } C' \subset C \end{aligned}$$

That is, since the sign functions as an element of the repertory, we have the sign operations of *adjunction*, *superization* (internal and external), and *iteration*. The entire triadic-trichotomic sign relation is expressed as

$$S = R(M(\text{Qu, Sin, Leg}), O_M(\text{Ic, In, Sy}), I_M(\text{Rhe, Dic, Arg})) \quad (\gamma)$$

It follows that the operations mentioned above lead to the generation of the three possible I_M (interpretant related to means, i.e., representamina) types: Rhe, Dic, Arg (open, closed, independent connections). We can therefore introduce operators of the sign operations and also a mode of formalization:

$$\text{Adj } (s_1, s_2, \dots, s_n) = s_1 \angle s_2 \angle \dots \angle s_n = \bigwedge_{i=1}^n s_i = R(S(M), S(O_M), S(3.1)) \quad (\delta)$$

$$\text{Super } (s_1, s_2, \dots, s_n) = s_1 \supset s_2 \supset \dots \supset s_n = \bigvee_{i=1}^n s_i = R(S(M), S(O_M), S(3.2)) \quad (\epsilon)$$

$$\text{Iter } (s_1, s_2, \dots, s_n) = s_1 \Delta s_2 \Delta \dots \Delta s_n = \bigtriangleup_{i=1}^n s_i = R(S(M), S(O_M), S(3.3)) \quad (\zeta)$$

This idea was inspired by the examples Peirce gave: “aggregation and combination of signs” (2.241). The operators \bigwedge , \angle , Δ are semiotic operators, the properties of which must be determined.

Adjunction has the lowest degree of semioticity; iteration, the highest. Their power is in inverse relation to the degree of semioticity. Several properties can be enunciated: commutativity, associativity, distributivity. Likewise:

$$\begin{array}{lll} \Delta (\angle) = \Delta & \angle (\angle) = \angle & \supset (\angle) = \supset \\ \Delta (\supset) = \Delta & \angle (\supset) = \supset & \supset (\supset) = \supset \quad (\eta) \end{array}$$

The need for semiotic calculation, which the matricial inscription suggested by Bense and Walther renders possible, presupposes the continuation of the study of the properties of the sign operations. In fact, relational calculus (*Relationszahl*), proposed by Bense, and categorial (*Kategorialzahl*), proposed by Marty, concerning open, closed, and autonomous signs (*offene, geschlossene und vollständige Zeichen*) solve the same problem, but in a different manner.

The sign operations applied to a given repertory weakens the relation to the objects for which the sign stands. It is obvious that the $AS_{\text{sem}} = F(S(I), S(M)) \rightarrow f_{\text{sem}} (\text{Sign} \rightarrow \text{Sign } \textit{conex})$. Bense (1974) here introduced the concept of *supericon* as the expression of *conexity*. The aesthetic state comprises two components: matricial and formal, i.e., (3.1 2.1 1.1) (3.1 2.1 1.3) so that the aesthetic supericon is generally of the type (3.1 2.1 1.2). It should be added that every semiotic attempt in aesthetics implies the consideration of both the “three trichotomies” that divide all triadic relations into ten classes (Walther, 1976), and the divisions concerning the object (Immediate, Dynamic) (Eliade, 1967). In fact, Peirce was aware of the necessity of a *homogenous* consideration of the syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic in their unity, not isolated (as occurs in Morris’s traditional view).

II. The aesthetic problem that we would like to resolve from the semiotic perspective is that of the sculptural ensemble at Tirgu Jiu, a work so singular in the creation of its author as well as in sculpture in general. The enunciation of the problem is simple: What does this ensemble represent? To this problem other questions attach themselves: How was it synthesized? What is its aesthetic state? What is, consequently, its value?

We should point out that until now, in attempts expressing interest and love for the sculptor and his work, no one has succeeded in more than the semantic interpretation of its components, the whole remaining only a reference element of its parts. We shall proceed inductively, but the preliminary examples will hold our attention only to the extent to which they contribute to solving the question already enunciated. In the figurative, or *apparently* figurative, zone of Brancusi’s sculpture—for example, the *Portrait of Miss Pogany*—the question concerning the type of sign used is seemingly simple: “Whose statue is this?”



Fig. A

The answer may be, “It is Farragut.” The meaning of this answer is a *Dicent Indexical Legisign* (Peirce, 2. 265), that is (3.2 2.2 1.3). In fact, Brancusi’s first *Miss Pogany* can be semiotically defined in the light of Peirce’s specifications (as quoted above). Afterwards, the sculptor executes *series*, which are not *replicas*, but modalities of placing signs in relation. The motive remains the same; the repertory and the sign operations are changed.

Basically, one of the perspectives from which Brancusi’s work can be viewed is that of the mode in which it shows itself as an establishment of signs. The sculptor sets up a semiotics *sui generis* whose primary evidence stems from the ascertainment of the contradiction between *the great number of works* and *the restricted list of fundamental themes* which these works transfigure. This implicit semiotics comprises a repertory of signs and the rules of their juxtaposition (composition). Examining the known series—*Birds* (known under their Romanian mythological name as *Maestre*), *Tortoise*, *Columns*, *Gates*, among others, one can easily observe how a particular sign (of flight, wisdom, infinity, love, etc.) is imposed over others. The particular sign serves as the primordial element, not through elimination—and therefore not through the opposite presence of absence—but through the articulation of sculptural forms as a hierarchical system of signs, that is, as an *ensemble*. If, for example, if the *Bird in Flight* is removed from its pedestal (the pedestal created from elements apparently independent of the image-sign which names the work), it then practically loses its significance and remains, in the best of cases, a decorative object. (One *Bird in Flight* gave rise to the trial between the American Customs authorities and the artist. Basically, the debate during the trial, which united sculptors and critics, centered upon the *uniqueness* of the work, hence its intrinsic quality as *Sinsign*). It is not only a matter of the work’s static, nor its inscription to the ellipsis of harmony. It is a matter of the reciprocal relationships among the signs, regardless of whether they are merely components of the pedestal, or the representative sign that gives the work its name or, especially, the significance of each work in part.

Here is how such a work can be defined semiotically, with and without the pedestal:



Fig. B

Without pedestal: a stylized image (of a bird, tortoise, fish, seal, etc., cf. Fig. A), therefore an iconic sign (2.1), has as representamen (Immediate Object relation) a *Qualisign* and a *Rhematic* interpretant (3.1), because it cannot be said what bird (tortoise, fish, seal, etc.) *in particular* is represented. The designation of the object—pertaining to the mytho-magical representation in Romanian folklore—therefore the becoming of the interpretant as *Dicent*, (3.2), takes place only through context analysis.

With pedestal: an evidently symbolic image, unique (even in the series to which it belongs by name, i.e., birds, tortoises, fish, seals, etc.), hence sign class (3.2 2.3 1.3). The duality indicates the type of trichotomy (3.1 3.2 2.3). The signs are placed in relation through *superization* (internal and external). The reciprocal relation (which can be expressed in terms of categories, and only in such terms) of the two elementary signs determines the appearance of a new quality. The sign distances itself from the immediate object and places itself mainly in the sphere of its reference to the dynamic object.

Two series of consequence stem from this first observation. First: Brancusi's aesthetics is above that of line, form, technique, and even style—although his work is exemplary in these aspects—and is constituted at the level of archetypal signs and the sublime laws of their articulation. Second: his aesthetics, and consequently the work's philosophy, is that of the ensemble, integrally harmonious, conceived under the sign of unity between the syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic (the latter extended to art's magical effects—a candid as well as surprising vanity of the artist's part).

It must be emphasized that mathematical-informational analysis (S. Giedion, A. Gheorghiu, M. Nadin), in addition to having demonstrated the *constatantiality of the idea with the media* (matter), have brought to light the close connection between the two above-mentioned observations. The *golden section*, as an internal aesthetic norm, is rediscovered from the works of small dimension (miniature ensembles) to *the Endless Column*. This "sectioning" places the signs of the "pedestal" in-relation to the representative sign and embodies, in unforeseeable aspects of extreme refinement, a unifying, syntactic principle. Brancusi's application of variational principles (for example, treatment of the ovoid form until attaining its purity) is basically equivalent to a semiotic process of superization, that is, the summarizing of a series of signs or of a repertory, in order to reach the synthesis of a new sign (super-sign). As a sign of higher order, it generates a new sign relation and therefore a new repertory. One can speak, in this sense, of the ensemble in Brancusi's vision as a super-sign, a concept that is extended, with the necessary nuances, to that unique Ensemble at Tirgu Jiu.

The generation of the aesthetic state thus appears as the result of the generation of a new interpretant relationship. The bearer material (wood, marble, stone, metal) is not considered as a mere substratum, but again as an indexical relationship, between the repertory of the means and the aesthetic state (AS_{sem}) aroused.

Breaking with anthropomorphic tradition, Brancusi's sculpture, in its series, depicts the passage from a (high) degree of iconicity to another (lesser), which in Moles' scale of 12 values corresponds to the progressive attainment of the abstract. Paraphrasing Louis Lavelle, we can notice the passage from the "cry, that supreme immodesty"—the sign just barely uncovered, extracted from the archetypal lava of the horizon (social-cultural) of reference—to "abstraction, that supreme modesty," the ideal to which each work tends in part.

A more rigorous examination from the angle of semiotic concepts—we have the most general one in mind, that is, Peircean semiotics, but also similar particular models like the one elaborated by de Saussure, or by Ernst Cassirer—will produce other revelations. The sign is the unity between means (substratum), object (in whose place it stands), and interpretant (for which it functions). Thus it deserves to be seen, in each of the three domains of reference (three dimensions), what the real determination of the sign in Brancusi's sculpture is, and even what its historic path is. In effect, signs are not simply a transcription of the signs from archetypal folkloric elements but their reconsideration. Heidegger would have said discovery—*aletheia*—from the perspective of a new time and civilization.

The elementary fact of estrangement of the primitive repertory raises problems of *genetic semiotics*. It can thus be observed, for example, that the signs of his sculpture are not only aesthetic—an important observation to the extent to which we assist in their validation on the scale of modern civilization and their integration in a new structure of myth and ceremony. What defines them is their high degree of syncretism, surprising at a time and in a world of specialization and unilateralization. Thus, in the *domain of means*, they simultaneously have the dimension of *Qualisign* ("a quality which is a Sign," 2.244), *Sinsign* ("being only one," 2.245) and *Legisign* ("a law that is a Sign . . . a general type which . . . shall be significant," 2.246) through the quality of artistic finishing, through imposition as existence *in itself* (a uniquely aesthetic statute and form), and through the repeated expression of the golden law of proportion as an internal norm. In the domain of objects, the transition from the iconic statute (2.1) to the indexical (2.2) and symbolic (2.3) can be noticed. In the domain of the interpretant, the transition (internal superization) is from open structure (double connection), that is, from the *Rhematic* statute to the *Dicentric* and even the condition of *Argument* (logical closing) which the Ensemble at Tirgu Jiu fulfills.

The *modular principle* of Brancusi's sculpture—anticipation of a direction that imposed itself upon the production due to the aesthetic exigencies of the design—is fundamentally the consequence of the semiotic condition of this sculpture. In this case, we can consider the artist's action itself as an outright type of semiosis, synthetic (and even generative) semiotics, a process of revealing signs and of placing them in relation. Considering here the series of themes and the series of signs, we can observe that Brancusi has a veritable demiurgic instinct. In the tradition of the mytho-magical models that he knew, he takes up the philosophy of primordial elements in order to reconstruct a world through the combination of its fundamental signs (Fig. C). Thus is explained why the signs are always presented in conjunction or disjunction, in series or in arborescent constructions, no sign ever proposed as such, regardless of the stage of its elaboration and finishing.

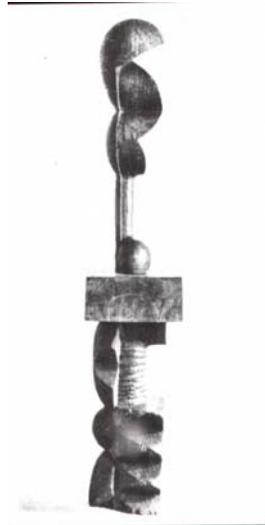


Fig. C

This hypothesis has recently been confirmed by a study in art history made by professor Edith Balas (University of Pittsburgh). Photographs have shown that certain works were sectioned, assembled, and reassembled; that the sculptor pursued the relationship between segments as relationships between autonomous signs. (See “The Sculpture of Brancusi in the Light of His Romanian Heritage,” *Art Journal*, XXXV/2). Everything is presented as a *relation* and is ontologically justified as an ideal relationship between components. The law of the ensemble is the law of its proportions. And although a unique law—the golden section—governs all its series, monotony is avoided because the law itself is dissimulated, not only with imagination, but also with deep psychological intuition. Recent calculations permit us to observe that where the golden section is apparently abandoned, the artist appeals, for the distribution of volume, to the Fibonacci sequence, transposing the law of the harmony of discrete distribution (as in musical notation) to the continuous distribution of surfaces in space. Among other conclusions that result from this, the exceptional intuition of the universal nature of signs is of the most interest for us.

A relatively constant subject of discussion concerning Brancusi’s work is his sources. The series of columns (wood, plaster, metal—see also Fig. B) has the advantage of placing an analysis of the type we propose in a context permitting attempts at comparison, therefore a genetic analysis. The history of culture has recorded several types of reference (from classic Grecian architecture—Doric, Ionic, Corinthian—to Roman, including such decorative ones as *Trajan’s Column* to columns of Near and Far Eastern architecture and their contemporary reproductions and replicas). Likewise, the aesthetic functions, as well as others not necessarily architectural, fulfilled have been pointed out. Finally, the wide-range significance of columns cannot be ignored, implying their ceremonial symbolism, including birth, marriage and death in the mytho-magical representations of Romanian (but not only Romanian) folklore. We can imagine various methods, arriving, if need be, at a rigorous formalization in order to establish similarities that express not only the degree of aesthetic proximity, but also the degree of general proximity, in the knowledge that we are discussing multi-functional objects. It is interesting to observe that the *de-functionalization* of columns in the course of time actually diminishes the hierarchical order. Organic columns (especially Ionic) occupy, regardless of how the hierarchy is set up, a privileged place. The analysis demonstrates that the class of columns—indexical signs (3.2 2.2 1.2)—made as replicas (2.1 2.2 2.3)—hence Secondness—is constituted practically at the half interval between strictly functional and exclusively decorative columns. The latter are circumstantial through their very condition, with a statute distinct from both, which can have iconic elements also.

The calculations in the hypothesis we have pursued (that is, of serialization in relation to the principles of connotation which the columns have shown in sculpture as well as in the culture of an epoch, in civilization in general) are interesting also in themselves. Basically, it is a matter of principle in the hierarchy of signs (Peirce solved this by referring to the triadic system or category), therefore of disposal in the succession from quality (Firstness, 3.1 2.1 1.1) with thematization (1.1 1.2 1.3), to action (Secondness, 3.2 2.2 1.2) with thematization (2.1 2.2 2.3), and to representation (Thirdness, 1.3 2.3 3.3) with thematization (3.1 3.2 3.3); from possibility to reality and necessity; from propriety to state and relation. Doing these calculations over in consideration of the fundamental connotations

(perennity, elegance, solitude, pride, daring, universality, etc.) of each type of column in part, it can be observed that the Brancusi series is defined through its high degree of consistency. Therefore it accepts no proximity to the types mentioned above, situating itself at an appreciable syntactic and semantic distance from them. It constitutes itself as self-determined type.

Confronting the reality of his *Columns* with the accepted list of connotations (departing from the genetically determined, that is architectural, and keeping in mind those of a historical and aesthetic type), we observe that there is a transcendence from the indexical sign (accomplishing a *nexal* link between object and sign) to the symbolic sign. The syncretic nature of the signs of Brancusi's sculpture is reconfirmed through the fact that the new *Column* (Fig. D) implies accumulated connotations.



Fig. D

The idea of narrow unities between the syntactic—evident even in the way in which different materials are utilized—semantic, and pragmatic aspects of each *Column* is justified. The above-mentioned series, in which one example (as in the case of *Birds-Maestre*) is recommended as “. . . a Design which Should Expand to Fill the Vault of Heaven,” does not merely iterate signs but reiterates the significant aspiration towards the *Ensemble*.

The quality of synthesis, which the ensemble has in Brancusi's conception, can escape notice when we speak only of projects or when we identify elements of ensemble in the structure of smaller works. It becomes evident however, and sheds new light on his work in its integrality, when we refer to the *Ensemble* in which his concept is effectively emphasized (*The Temple of Love* or the *Temple of Meditation* were conceived as ensembles but unfortunately never accomplished as such). I do not wish to participate in the historical-sociological discussion over whether the sculptor completed or not the *Ensemble* at Tirgu Jiu. This question opens the way for hypotheses and speculations that have little to do with the problem occupying us in this study. It seems that the project, revealed step by step, was at a certain point more generous and that difficulties dictated, if not renunciation, then at least adaptation to conditions (historical, material, natural). In a semiotic relationship, the *Ensemble* is coherently complete.

A true premise for the fundamental idea of the conjugation of the *Ensemble's* signs as a coherently constituted system with given signs (or if need be, partially modified) of the chosen environment can be noticed. The *Ensemble* is the place of synthesis of the fundamental motives of Brancusi's work: The *Table of Silence*, a traditional pedestal (in the broad semiotic sense already established) of so many works, supports a bird or a fish, a seal, an egg or a tortoise, invisible or simply amplified to infinity, “to fill the vault of heaven.” This is not a poetic explanation, but one stemming from the reality of the work and of the aesthetic program of its maker. The stools take up the motive of the egg or of the tortoise (the segmented sphere superimposed as a symbol of the pair in its contradictory unity), prefiguring a *replica* (in the semiotic sense) to the traditional sign of time (the *Clepsydra*). *The Gate of*

the Kiss is directly related to the motives of the period (1907-1910) of the first revelations (*Prayer, Kiss, Wisdom of the Earth*). The whole culminates in the *Endless Column*, the synthesis of the entire series of columns and actual proof of a new aesthetics of the monumental (in particular, of a new morphology of spatial forms and of the suggestion of spiritual infinity). Practically no important sign and no motive remains unintegrated in this *Ensemble*. The repertory of signs and specific rules for their functioning (adjunction, superization, iteration) lead to the realization of a new sign (supersign) with a double determination—spatial and temporal (the axis of time inscribed on the *Column's* polished surface), which should be appreciated and known in this particular condition. Beyond its value of recognition, the *Ensemble* imposes in aesthetics and the philosophy of art (especially sculpture) a new spatial-temporal conception opposing to the discrete (atomistic), decorative, or evocative nature of this genre, the ideal of an art with an integrating function. It is not a question of the structuring of a space, but of investing the whole with a complex function of sign related to the integrality of human existence, not only certain aspects of it.

Even if the whole was occasioned by a traditional theme—homage to the Romanian heroes fallen in war, which is the Immediate Object—its solution follows a fundamentally new aesthetics. The artist integrates the particular theme of command, which he took upon himself in the broader vision of the philosophy of existence. The tale of the *Ensemble*, that is, translation from the universe of the visual (from the syntactic level of the supersign) to that of the discursive (to the semantic level) evidently recommends it as an image of life: birth, love, sacrifice. Birth and death are reunited, reminiscent of the archaic myth. The Dicent (3.2 in the perspective of the interpretant) of the *Table* represents not only the table of the dead (a sign which constantly pertains to the funeral ceremony), but also the pedestal for the Bird, Egg, Fish, and Seal. Time, embodied by the Clepsydra, manifests its double effigy in a pure Parmenidic tradition.

Here is the semiotic analysis:

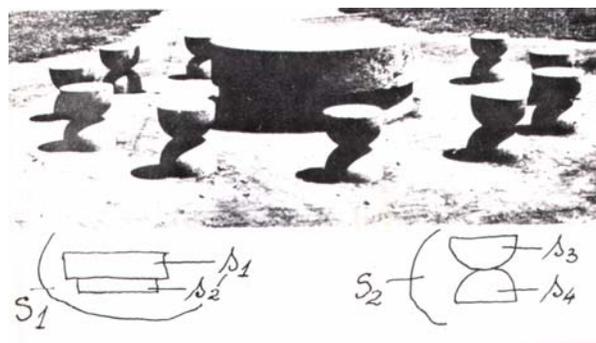


Fig. E

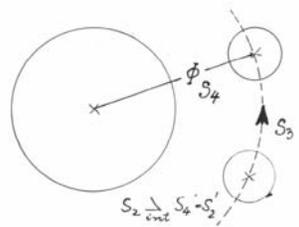


Fig. F

$$\begin{aligned}
 s_1 &= (3.1 \quad 2.1 \quad 1.1); & s_3 &= (3.1 \quad 2.1 \quad 1.2) \\
 s_2 &= (3.1 \quad 2.1 \quad 1.1) & s_4 &= (3.2 \quad 2.2 \quad 1.3) \\
 s_1 &\leftarrow s_2 = s_1 & s_4 &= (3.2 \quad 2.2 \quad 1.3) \\
 s_3 &\rightarrow s_4 = s_2 & s_5 &= (3.2 \quad 2.2 \quad 1.2) \\
 & & s_2 &\rightarrow_{int} s_4 = s'_2 \\
 & & s_2 &\rightarrow (s_1 \rightarrow s'_2) = \mathcal{P} 1
 \end{aligned}$$

The sign of life is conjugated with that of love: the *Gate of the Kiss*. Brancusi declared, "Simplicity is not an aim in art, but one can reach simplicity in spite of oneself, approaching the real sense of things." (La simplicité n'est pas un but dans l'art, mais on arrive à la simplicité malgré soi en s'approchant du sens réel des choses.) It is clear that things came about in just this way in the evolution from *The Kiss*—a masterpiece of synthesis, still an iconic sign—to *The Gate*, with fewer anthropomorphic qualities revealed, but all the more essential.

In semiotic terms, it has the triple dimension of *Dicent*, *Symbol*, *Legisign*, the character of the indexical sign (a system of oriented access), or the iconic sign, transferred to a secondary level. Alongside the iconic sign of *The Kiss* repeated on the architrave (which recalls the dowry chest) on the portal appears the sign, also iconic, of *The Eye* (also a motive for another series, culminating in the *Sleeping Muse*). A series of other signs, *Zodiac* (indexical), which is also the repetition of the unit of twelve, through which connection with the number of stools placed around the indexical sign of the *Table* is made, are constituted as *Rhematic* openings towards the other elements of the *Ensemble*.



Fig. G

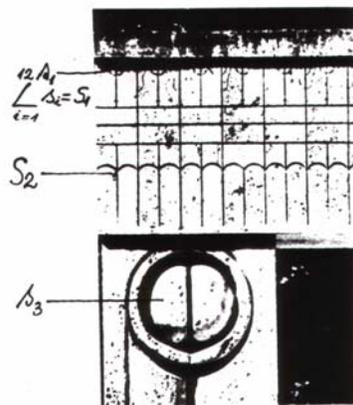


Fig. H

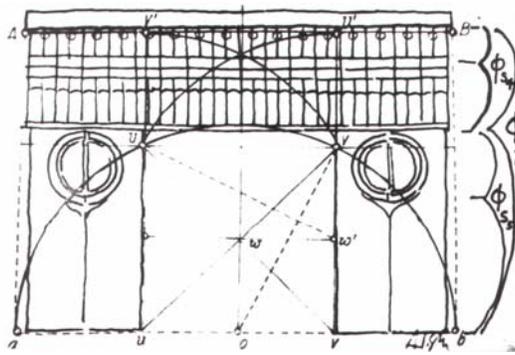


Fig. 1

$$\begin{aligned}
 s_1 &= (3.1 \quad 2.2 \quad 1.2); \bigtriangleright_{i=1}^{1.2} s_i = (3.2 \quad 2.2 \quad 1.2) = s_1 \\
 s_2 &= (3.1 \quad 2.1 \quad 1.2); \bigtriangleright_{i=1}^4 s_i = (3.2 \quad 2.2 \quad 1.2) \\
 s_4 &= (3.2 \quad 2.2 \quad 1.3); \quad s_5 = (3.2 \quad 2.2 \quad 1.3); \\
 s_6 &= (3.2 \quad 2.3 \quad 1.3); \\
 s_2 \triangleleft s_3 &= (3.1 \quad 2.1 \quad 1.2) = s_2'; \\
 \mathcal{J} 2 = \bigtriangleright_{i=1} s_i &= (3.2 \quad 2.2 \quad 1.2) = s_4 \Delta s_5 \Delta s_6 \triangleright (s_2' \triangleright s_1)
 \end{aligned}$$

Although they can be considered as signs in themselves, *Table*, *Gate*, and *Column* were conceived in their unity as a unique supersign. For example, *Gate* and *Table*, due to their dominant motives with evident iconic elements, present themselves as structured from the interior (cosmological signs acting as indexical signs and establishing a law of repetition of the basic motive), and converted into the symbolic. The *Ensemble* reunites instantiated signs (thus from the category of the Necessary) with natural signs (thus from the category of the Possible and the Real), synthesizing a whole which lays claim to natural and to aesthetic need.

The *Endless Column* represents the culminating point. Isolated from the context (i.e., separated from the other signs and from the rules of their conjugation) the *Column* has become the object of several interpretations: a symbol of rebirth, with every generation being obligated create and aspire to ever higher ideals; the *Column of Yearning* (translating from the semantic to the syntactic a Romanian word ("dor") that cannot be precisely translated; the *Heroes Column*. We shall try not to repeat the error of symbolic deciphering, which tends towards poeticizing and to the anthropomorphism and tradition of atomistic sculpture.

Useful data can be drawn from an analysis of the origins of this *Column*—from the familiar echoes of Far Eastern architecture to the elements of peasant architecture and to mytho-magical representations from Romanian folklore: the symbol of the gravestone of unmarried youths, the sign of a new household, of a wedding, etc. It is nevertheless certain that in transplanting of folkloric motifs, relatively easy to recognize, from the space of signs corresponding to a mytho-magical model of great purity and evident ingenuity to the space of the world as world, Brancusi, through the correlation and interconditioning that the *Ensemble*, as a coherent semiotic system determines, endowed them with the condition of universal signs of a new mythical state. They are turned from signs of folklore to signs of art and are marked with the seal of pride of he who reconsiders their condition and through it establishes a symbolic link between the past (come upon in the essentiality of its representations) and the future, to which this supersign is proposed as a significant representation. Brancusi grasps that which pertains to the essence of existence and searches for the semiotic equivalent of this essence.

The *Column* is *Dicentric* ("apt for significance"). Let us observe, however, that each module in part is a *Rhema-Icon-Qualisign*, which, beyond technical formulation, signifies its nature as a unique sign as well as its quality of being a premise for a determined ensemble (*Argument*) and its quality as a sign defined as a law transposed into processed material suitable to special demands (metal covered with a reflective layer).

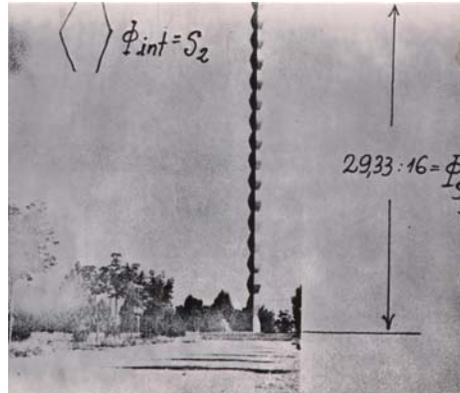


Fig. J

Here is the semiotic analysis:

$$\begin{aligned}
 s_1 &= (3.1 \quad 2.1 \quad 1.1): \quad s'_1 = (1.1 \quad 1.2 \quad 1.3) \text{ "firstness"} \\
 S_1 &= \sum_{i=1}^{16} s_i = (3.2 \quad 2.2 \quad 1.2); \quad S_2 = (3.1 \quad 2.1 \quad 1.2) \\
 S_3 &= (3.1 \quad 2.1 \quad 1.2) \\
 \mathcal{J}_3 &= (s_2 \Delta s_3) \Delta_{\substack{\text{ext} \\ \text{int}}} S_1
 \end{aligned}$$

Considering here the *partial* signs in their unity (the supersign *Ensemble*), we indeed have the *ideal* transition from a beginning to a generic ending (death and birth in their unity) to an anticlimax (love and passion as the principles of any existence), and finally, to revelation in the open, sublime sign (with tragic connotations). That is because the *Column* is the expression of the tragic, far from connoting optimism and trite exaltation. The whole is the interaction of partial signs S_1, S_2, S_3 , and it is represented by $S_E = (3.3 \quad 2.3 \quad 1.3)$ with the reality of the interpretant (3.1 3.2 3.3), hence with the condition of Thirdness. The *Column*, taken as an element in itself (3.2 2.2 1.2) has the status of an Index. In the *Ensemble*, it fulfills the role of a symbolic sign. This interaction of signs corresponds to their intimate nature, Peirce's definition of the sign having the merit, confirmed on this occasion also, of evincing its contextual determination.

The *Column's* modular principle is concordant with the principle of the whole work and reflects its semiotic condition. The *Column* starts out on a half element representing the ideal barely prefigured and assumed. It also ends in a half: the impossibility of attaining the ideal because life's limited duration and the unlimited duration that the ideal represents form an irreducible totality. The attained ideal becomes the reality from whose altitude the aspiration towards a new ideal continues, the succession being practically infinite. Each ideal attained is a step towards something else; aspiration is essential. At the origins, a heroic motive was found (the immediate object), transposed into the idea that existence itself is a heroic fact (dynamic object) to the extent to which a person devotes him/herself to pursuing an ideal (final interpretant). It is a sublime vanity clearly revealed in the unique sign that only apparently prefigures a new solution in the suggestion of the infinite. In fact, it embodies a process, *not* a concept. As unity between idea and the material into which the idea was transposed, the *Column-sign* detaches itself from the art whose principle was illusion in order to represent the idea in its essence, not merely in its phenomenality.

Creating or resuscitating signs—some origination centuries before his time—Brancusi looks for the unity in the aspect of things, not differences, because the sign does not differentiate; it unifies (integrates). The rationalization of aesthetic forms derives from this. The entire *Ensemble* has an integrating character that is found in the fundamental accord between human beings and the world. It is not decomposed in partial symbols nor splintered in the significances of some of its details. Rather, it presents itself as a whole and functions as such. When, due to the effects of time and airborne pollution the *Columns* lost the thin coat of reflective metal applied to them, they seemed to become inert. The effect of this was reflected in the appearance of the entire *Ensemble*. This degenerative semiotic process jeopardized the third dimension of the sign (and thus the sign itself). Fortunately, it was not an irreversible process. (The *Ensemble* did risk irreversible damage when, under the communist regime, it was suggested that the *Column* was an expression of decadent bourgeois art and should be torn down). The uninspired attempt to protect the *Table of Silence* by placing it in the *frame* of a fence and encircling it with a chain in order to keep onlookers at a distance—affected not only this component sign of the *Ensemble* but also the whole. Isolation (an artificial superization not in keeping with the system Brancusi established) detached one component from the singular supersign, presenting it as autonomous, rendering it unrepresentative within the *Ensemble's* framework of functioning as a whole.

The *Ensemble's* intimate philosophy can be described as the complex in which the parts are inter-conditioned and significance (sense and senses) stems from its functioning as a semiotic system consistent with the sculptural work. We are, in fact, afar removed from sculptural narrativity (i.e., sequential representation, such as in the high relief that decorated the great monuments of antiquity). The *Ensemble-sign configures* a forcefield; it structures a space and is structured in space, ingeniously implicating temporality. Hence the symbolic character: space and time for meditation and recollection. The object identifies itself with significance, therefore the class of objects (3.1 2.2 1.3) and thematization (3.1 2.2 1.3) reflecting this condition. Actually, the *Ensemble* itself is a context; after realizing it, Brancusi no longer evolved but began a phase of resumption (relative sterility, a subject which has preoccupied Mircea Eliade, 1967). This is the reason why it can be considered, in relation to the sculptor's work, an indexical sign. Moreover, rigorous analysis

$$O_{imm}, O_{dyn}, I_{dyn} (2 \text{ steps}), I_{fin}$$

demonstrates how consecutive adjunction, superization, and iteration participate in the transition from the Rhematic nature of the constituent signs in establishing the value of the whole. On a normalized scale (with values distributed from 0 to 1) of iconicity and supericonicity, the *Ensemble* tends towards the maximum:

$$A\mathcal{V}_{sem} = F(\text{Supericonicity}) = \lim_{n \rightarrow \infty} 1 + \frac{1}{n} = 1$$

Max Bense observed that the high level of semioticity is the expression of a high level of *onticity* ("Mit wachsender semiotizität steigt auch die Ontizität der Repräsentation an," 1976, p. 60). This adds to the significance already in evidence the significance of sculpture as the establishment of signs that are also ontologically significant. Without occasioning a semiotic analysis per se, the projects for the ensembles not carried out show the artist's reconsideration of the rapport with the living being of the contemplator (beholder) interpretant in terms of sign theory. He envisioned the beholder as part of the sign, imposing more rigid structures—space for only one person—and therefore of increased *conexity*, in accord with the spiritual functionality of each of the projects. Of all the elements repeating the kiss motive, *The Column of the Kiss*—initially, it seems juxtaposed to the *Endless Column* in the *Ensemble*—constituted the module-sign of the *Temple of Love*. A morphological modification helped in the synthesis of another type of inner space—the one destined for the *Temple of Meditation*—and thus of cutting the sign through absence, like a negative of the form, and dressing it (in Henri Moore's sense of the *sculpture of emptiness*).

Along this line of semiotic analysis, findings have thus accumulated that confirm and explain the negation of anthropomorphism, of plastic illusion (as a spatial-temporal illusion with the essence of an index (or *hypindex*, according to Peirce) in keeping with the Aristotelian principle of *mimesis*. Brancusi affirmed: "An aim exists in all things. In order to reach it, one must become free of himself." (Il y'a un but dans toutes les choses. Pour y arriver il faut se degager de soi-meme.") The need for objectivity stems, from the sign's definition per se. The institutionalizing nature (of signs) that art manifests basically changes its statute.

Value does not have the nature of an object, but of a sign (Nadin, 1978), that is,

$$AV_{\text{sem}} = F(\text{Semioticity}).$$

The high degree of semioticity towards which Brancusi's sculpture tends is a reflex of consciousness and thus of symbolic intentionality (so frequently emphasized by the artist). Some elements in particular are certain: symmetry, accord, and contrasts can be quantified without the whole being considered as a work of ruler and compass. Even the persistence of the *golden section* (ϕ) is more than the reflex of the tendency towards establishing signs and the rules of their functioning in the *Ensemble*, an intrinsic law, mysterious but uncontestable. Discovering the essence of monumentality *that does not depend on dimensions*, Brancusi raises the particular law of the number expressing the symmetry of the natural world to the level of a harmonic principle of its repertory of signs. He thus brings to modern aesthetics the superior consciousness of the reciprocal relationships among their elements, that is, a vision of the order of the system. Historical, morphological and philosophical research should have been followed up by semiotic research. Brancusi's work has no cause to fear such knowledge.

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