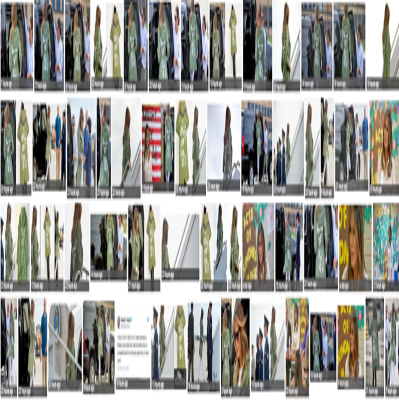




Full indexical jacket

Description

Art in the 1970s shifted to the indexical, according to Rosalind Krauss, and away from the symbolic.

As distinct from symbols, indexes establish their meaning along the axis of a physical relationship to their referents. They are the marks or traces of a particular cause, and that cause is the thing to which they refer, the object they signify. Into the category of the index, we would place physical traces (like footprints), medical symptoms, or the actual referents of the shifters. Cast shadows could also serve as the indexical signs of objects (70).

She refers to Marcel Duchamp's readymades, including a work called the *Large Glass*, in which elements are colored by the fixing of dust that had fallen on the prone surface of the glass over a period of months. The accumulation of dust is a kind of physical index for the passage of time (75).

Pronouns

As does C.S. Peirce, she highlights the *pronoun* as the prime example of an index. Duchamp's [Machine Optique](#), features a revolving disc of text, exploring the division of the self into an *I* and a *you*.

Pronouns are indexical signs, more specifically they are *rhematic indexical legisigns*: he, she, it, him, her, this, that those, etc. These words are *legisigns* as they rely on conventions or rules to function as signs, in this case following some basic rules of grammar.

Pronouns are *rhemes* in that they are incomplete without the thing to which they refer. After all, unconnected pronouns lead to ambiguity: e.g. *He said he would go to his golf course*. The pronoun *he* in this case could refer to one person or three different people, or just two people.



As if to assert the value in fashion, as in art, of indexicality, “I REALLY DON’T CARE, DO U?” printed graffiti-like on the back of a \$USD 26 jacket is a *dicent symbolic legisign*. It is a straightforward proposition that can be assessed as either true or false.

But it also contains pronouns. The “I” is the person wearing the jacket. The “U” (you), is the person reading the text. And there is an invisible indexical “the unstated it”: “I REALLY DON’T CARE ABOUT IT”. What is *it*?

That pronoun could index the price of the jacket: It’s cheap and I don’t care. “It” could be a humanitarian crisis involving the separation of children from parents at the US border. The whole statement could be a cry of defiance by the wearer (against the press), or a cry for help. In the latter cases the whole graffito is a *dicent indexical legisign* as the statement is complete and self-contained, as when a street vendor draws attention to a product by calling out its name: “Big Issue”?

This indexical excursion is a useful exercise for me as I’m compiling a glossary of Peircean terms. Here are some of Peirce’s key terms that help define a category of a sign.

- **Argument:** A rule, or collection of rules, of inference that gets passed between interlocutors in a spirited conversation: e.g. what is your argument?
- **Delome:** Peirce’s alternative term for an argument.
- **Dicent:** That characteristic of a sign that is complete and self-contained, as when a street vendor draws attention to a product by calling out its name: “Big Issue”?
- **Icon:** That characteristic of a sign that operates through resemblance. So, a drawing of a building operates as a sign if it resembles it (i.e. if it is a “good likeness”).
- **Index:** That characteristic of a sign that operates by virtue of emerging from its object. Smoke is a sign of fire in that the smoke emanates from, or is caused by, the fire “directly and inevitably”. A photograph is also an index of its object as there is an optical-mechanical process linking the sign (photograph) to its object (the subject in the photograph). (Note that the photograph is also an iconic sign.) Pointing at something is also an indexical sign in that it indicates its object directly and inevitably.
- **Legisign:** A characteristic of a sign that is determined by convention. Words and symbols are typically legisigns in that you have to learn the conventions or rules of their use. A diagram of a class of buildings, or other generalised drawing, would also be a legisign.
- **Qualisign:** That qualitative aspect of a sign which operates irrespective of the medium it appears in. Such a quality can relate to features such as colour, texture, temperature, weight, beauty and ugliness, as well as their qualification: too heavy, too red, not red enough, etc.
- **Rheme:** A rheme is a part of a statement in language, a proposition, that needs the full proposition to make sense. For Peirce, pronouns are rhemes. They are incomplete without some

other sign of the thing (object) to which they refer.

- **Sinsign:** That aspect of a sign that operates as a singular sign, a one-off, as opposed to a sign that refers to a class of objects. A floor plan of a particular building is a sinsign. It excludes a diagram of a building type. Such a general diagram would be a *legisign*.
- **Symbol:** That aspect of a sign established through social convention, as in the case of mathematical symbols, abstract tokens, or spoken or written language. Symbols are always *legisigns*, but Peirce indicates that they can be further qualified as rhemes, dicents or arguments.

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