

EMBODIMENT AND MEDIATION: TOWARDS A MORE ROBUST PHILOSOPHY OF COMMUNICATION

CORPORIFICAÇÃO E MEDIAÇÃO: EM PROL DE UMA FILOSOFIA DA COMUNICAÇÃO MAIS ROBUSTA

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Abstract: *The philosophical idea of communication has dramatically run through ages between the Scylla of an untenable principle of telepathy —i.e. the ideal of a direct, unmediated conveyance of thought from mind to mind— and the Charybdis of solipsism. Despite Peirce never paid attention to the “problem of communication” as such, he was surely worried by such a challenging idea, at least in the way it can be arguably subsumed under the much more intricate problem of mediation. Nonetheless, Peirce’s late definition of the sign as a medium that communicates forms has to deal precisely with a rather problematic tension between an ideal of semiotic transparency and the need for concrete expression. In this paper, the author takes into account some earlier discussions in secondary literature concerning the challenge of semiotic transparency. It will then be argued that Peirce’s mature definition of the sign as a genuine medium is, to a great extent, intended to elucidate the conundrums of both telepathy and embodiment. In this sense, it will be defended that the sign, far from being a translucent vehicle for the conveyance of pure forms, is a genuine third that plays a key transformative role in allowing growth and development in the continuity of experience. Finally, some consequences will be drawn in order to build a more robust philosophy of communication in which the abysses of both semiotic idealism and solipsism are overcome without diminishing the imperatives of indeterminacy and corporeal incarnation.*

Keywords: *Philosophy of Communication. Sign. Transparency. Mediation. Embodiment.*

Resumo*: A idéia filosófica da comunicação percorreu dramaticamente todas as eras entre a Cila de um princípio de telepatia – i.e., o ideal de uma transmissão direta, não-mediada do pensamento de mente para mente – e o Caríbdis do solipsismo. Apesar de Peirce jamais ter dado atenção a “o problema da comunicação” como tal, ele certamente estava preocupado por tal idéia desafiadora, pelo menos de um modo que pudesse ser argumentativamente subsumido sob o problema muito mais intrincado da mediação. Não obstante, a definição tardia que Peirce deu do signo como “meio que comunica formas” tem a ver precisamente com uma tensão um tanto problemática entre um ideal de transparência semiótica e a necessidade de expressão concreta. Neste trabalho, o autor leva em consideração algumas discussões anteriores em literatura secundária concernentes ao desafio da transparência semiótica. Será então argumentado que a definição madura que Peirce deu de signo como sendo um meio genuíno é, em grande medida, tencionada a elucidar os enigmas tanto da telepatia como da incorporificação. Neste sentido, se defenderá que o signo, longe de ser um veículo translúcido para a transmissão de formas puras, é um terceiro genuíno que tem um papel fundamental transformador ao permitir o crescimento e desenvolvimento na continuidade da experiência. Finalmente, algumas conseqüências serão tiradas para poder construir uma robusta filosofia da comunicação, na qual os abismos tanto do idealismo semiótico quanto do solipsismo possam ser ultrapassados sem diminuir os imperativos do indeterminismo e da incorporificação física.

Palavras-chave*: Filosofia da Comunicação. Signo. Transparência. Mediação. Corporificação.

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“When an idea is conveyed from one mind to another, it is by forms of combination of the diverse elements of nature, say by some curious symmetry, or by some union of a tender color with a refined odor...If they are eternal, it is in the spirit they embody; and their origin cannot be accounted for by any mechanical necessity. They are embodied ideas; and so only can they convey ideas” (EP 1:331-2, 1892).

Introduction

In 1887, Peirce wrote a review article of what has become an infamous classic in the history of pseudo-science.ⁱ The book in question was *Phantasms of the Living*, written by E. M. Sidgwick, E. Gurney, F. W. H. Myers, and F. Podmore, and it was one of the first underpinnings in the so-called scientific exploration of paranormal activity and psychical research. Peirce was not enthusiastic about the conclusions defended in the book, and declared the proofs provided by the authors as simply dubious (*W* 6:81, 1887). It is now surprising — and to some extent, disconcerting— how a positive scientist and philosopher could even take the whole thing seriously. But the truth, disturbing or not, is that during the last decades of the 19th century, the topic of paranormal activity, specially the question of telepathy, received an extraordinary amount of attention in both popular culture and scientific circles. One of the main writers of the book, Frederic W. H. Myers, was in fact the person who coined the term “telepathy” for the very first time. Defined by Myers as “the communication of impressions of any kind from one mind to another, independently of the channels of sense,” telepathy has since then become a risible extravagance characterized by irrational speculations, as well as a very popular belief in ordinary thinking about communicative phenomena.ⁱⁱ Nevertheless, in clear contrast to its current usages, the term “telepathy” was not originally characteristic of superstitious thinking, but an attempt to explain spiritualist phenomena in a scientific way (Peters, 1999:105). Naïve spiritualism may seem today as a ridiculous piece of “gibberish” metaphysics, but it is actually one of the foundational sources of the modern notion of communication. Peirce himself was sensibly troubled by some problems implicit in the idea of telepathy, at least in the sense in which the sort of mental affection presumed by telepathic transmission could be related to his own doctrines of synechism and immediate perception.ⁱⁱⁱ

In introducing this topic, it is not my aim to study Peirce’s actual interest in the problem of telepathy, but merely to show that the history of communication theory shows a significantly perdurable interest in the possibility of immaterial thought-transfer —i.e. the idea that the sign is an empty vessel to be filled with spiritual content— and that Peirce himself was worried by such a challenging idea. Despite Peirce clearly denied the possibility of thought without manifestation, there are several passages in which he seemed to assume a concession to some kind of Platonism, in which pure “forms” ought to pass from mind to mind regardless of the mediatory action of the sign. In particular, as several scholars have shown, Peirce’s late definition of the sign as a medium of communication has to deal with a problematic tension between an ideal of transparency and the need for concrete expression (Parmentier, 1985, 1994; Keeler, 1990; Bergman, 2000, 2004; Freadman, 2004). My argument will run as follows: First of all, I will take into account some earlier discussions in secondary literature concerning the challenge of semiotic transparency. I will then argue that Peirce’s semeiotic is, to a great extent, intended to elucidate pragmatically the problem of embodiment. In this sense, it will be defended that the sign, far from being a translucent vehicle for the conveyance of pure forms, is a genuine third that plays a key transformative role in allowing growth and development in the continuity of experience. Finally, some consequences will be drawn in order to build a more robust philosophy of communication in which the abysses of

both semiotic idealism and solipsism are overcome without diminishing the imperatives of generality and corporeal incarnation.

Transparency and interpretation: In search for the onion itself

As it has been said in the introduction, several authors have dealt with the topic of transparency. It will be pertinent to cite here Richard Parmentier (1985, 1994), and Mats Bergman (2000, 2004), whose fine criticisms aided to clarify the question in a considerable way. The problem of transparency, to put it succinctly, has to do with the communion of ideas without relevant mediation. In models of semiotic transparency, ideational content has to be preserved from the roughness and pollution imparted by material signs, such as words, images, and the like. In other words, it is the long-standing desire of finding suitable vehicles for mental transportation without loss of purity and cleanliness. Before diminishing the idea too quickly, let us keep in mind that there is an honourable tradition in the history of western thought that shows serious longings for immaterial contact: Plato, Augustine, Descartes, Locke, all of them placed spirit in a higher level than body, as if interiority and consciousness were drastically divorced from its accidental incarnations. In a brilliant account of the history of communication, John Durham Peters attempted to reconstruct the narratives that made this picture possible. According to Peters (1999:74), the idea of mental transparency finds its roots in speculation about angelic communication. Provided that “angels have no carnal bodies, they are quite capable of fusing together in the bliss of pure intelligence” (Peters, 1999:74). As a consequence, the immediacy and incorruptness of angelic mental sharing served both as an ideal and a comparative model to appraise the deficiencies of the human voice. There is, above all, one decisive question that informs a foundational moment in semiotics and communication theory: “Does the carrier of the message occupy space or not?” (Peters, 1999:75)

Let us now put aside Peters’ reconstruction of the subject and turn back to Peirce. Certainly, Peirce the synechist is not suspicious of committing himself to any kind of dualism. It is well-known that one of the main themes in the pragmatist tradition is a severe dismissal of the dichotomies pervading modern thinking, such as those of mind-body, thought-matter, individual-community, and so on. Nevertheless, there are important passages scattered throughout Peirce’s writings in which the supposed semiotic merging of the human experience seems to collapse into a dichotomizing of the soul and the body. Take, for instance, one of Peirce’s more notable examples: “To try to peel off signs & get down to the real thing is like trying to peel an onion and get down to onion itself, the onion per se, the onion *an sich*” (*MS L387*, 1905). This is a remarkably lucid metaphor that deserves further explanation. It seems very surprising to me that this relatively renowned passage has not provoked much significant debate among scholars.^{iv} It is even more startling when we realize that the “onion” metaphor reappears in several places, though in a different guise. For example, in the manuscript “The Basis of Pragmaticism,” Peirce says: “a pure idea without metaphor or other significant clothing is an onion without a peel” (*EP 2:392*, c. 1906). And, again, in 1903: “The attempt to divest thought of expression and to get at the naked thought itself, which some logicians have made, is like trying to remove the peel from an onion and get at the naked onion itself” (*MS 450:3*, 1903).

In her book on Peirce’s theory of signs, Anne Freadman captured the heart and the core of the “onion” metaphor by relating it to the problem of semiosis as *mediation*. According to Freadman (2004:172), mediation is simply the mechanism that tries to make sense of the

dynamics between past and future orientations of the sign in the continuous process of acquiring knowledge. In this sense, mediation is fundamentally opposed to the so-called “diaphanization” of truth, roughly conceived as the project of removing layers —i.e. to peel the skin of the onion— in order to grasp truth in its purest manifestation. In a clear defense of Peirce’s unlimited semiosis, Freadman also quotes this splendid passage, in which Peirce seems to defeat the idea of coming closer to the naked truth:

The meaning of a representation can be nothing but a representation. In fact, it is nothing but the representation itself conceived as stripped of irrelevant clothing. But this clothing never can be completely stripped off; it is only changed for something more diaphanous. So there is an infinite regression here. Finally, the interpretant is nothing but another representation to which the torch of truth is handed along; and as representation, it has its interpretant again. Lo, another infinite series (*CP* 1.339, n.d.).

As Freadman observes, for Peirce “expression and thought are one” (*SS* 10, 1903) and that is the reason why Peirce contended the idea of truth devoid of all significant clothing. In the end, for Peirce pure ideas were no more than “vagabond thoughts (...) without any human habitation” (*CP* 8.112, c. 1900). This is, in Freadman’s words, a necessary consequence of semiosis. Let us see this in detail. It is an incontrovertible principle of semeiotic that all thought is in signs. According to Peirce, that every thought is a sign implies that every thought must determine another thought, namely, its interpretant, since that is the essence of a sign: “Yet that the thought should have *some* possible expression for some possible interpreter, is the very being of its being” (*CP* 4.6, c. 1906). But given that any sign is itself an interpretant of a previous sign, and this is also true of this preceding sign, there must have been an infinite series of interpretants over time. As Peirce concludes, that every thought must be interpreted in another, or that all thought is in signs, is but another way of saying that thought cannot happen in an instant, but requires a development in time (*EP* 1:24, 1868).

As Freadman points out, signs have no “efficiency” without translation, so that they cannot “grow” without transformation into other kinds of signs (2004:204). Consequently, mind is a product of semiosis, and not *vice versa*. To be sure, in Peirce’s early semeiotic, “the object of representation can be nothing but a representation of which the first representation is the interpretant,” and this process merges in an endless series of representations in which truth can only be grasped representatively (*CP* 1.339, n.d.). As a result of this continuous process of translation into subsequent interpretants, —as it were, of “adding layers,”— Freadman concludes, there is perhaps no truth other than the signhood of signs (2004:173): “It is quite as much a mystery, in truth, and you can no more get at the heart of it, than you can get at the heart of an onion” (*CP* 4.87). You cannot reach the onion *an sich*, because, even though the onion is not reducible to any of its particular layers, the skins of an onion are still *the* onion. As a consequence, “we can never attain a knowledge of things as they are” (*SS* 141, 1911). In other words, “man is so completely hemmed in by the bounds of his possible practical experience, his mind is so restricted to being the instrument of his needs, that he cannot, in the least, *mean* anything that transcends those limits” (*CP* 5.536, 1905).

I will argue this is only half of the story. Freadman’s account of unlimited semiosis offers a depiction of Peirce as a sort of “semeiotic idealist.” But as several scholars have shown, this is very far from being true (Short, 1986; Houser, 1992; Bergman, 2007).^v In fact, as long as Peirce became more and more sensitive of the “outward clash” of experience —i.e. his better appreciation of raw Secondness— he progressively abandoned the idea of unlimited semiosis, and, therefore, he became much more aware of some objective constraints on interpretation (Short, 2007:46-7). Furthermore, the texts quoted by Freadman are somewhat misleading, for

she skips important contextualizing passages that provide a very different picture. For instance, the “onion” metaphor is better placed, as some scholars have noticed, within Peirce’s discussion of immediate perception (Hausman, 1997; Bergman, 2007). Let me quote Peirce’s passage again, with the addition of some significant “layers:”

Reals are signs. To try to peel off signs & get down to the real thing is like trying to peel an onion and get down to onion itself, the onion per se, the onion *an sich*. If not *consciousness*, then, *sciuousness*, is the very being of things; and consciousness is their co-being (*MS L387*, 1905).

Here, Peirce introduces a helpful distinction between *consciousness* and *sciuousness*. According to Hausman (1997:188), this peculiar distinction suggests a different way of placing the origin of interpretation in the realm of presemiotic experience. Evidently, the *sciuousness-consciousness* distinction echoes the “double consciousness” of Ego and Non-Ego brought by the percept (*CP* 5.53, 1903); and, for that same reason, it also reminds the distinction made by Peirce between *dynamical* and *immediate* object. Thus Peirce can explain the continuity of perception and semiosis with the introduction of extrasemiotic constraints on interpretative action, even if the perceiver is not really aware of the brute inoculation of percepts within perceptual judgments through mediation of the *percipuum* (*CP* 7.642-681, 1903). It is the combination of synechism and this late adherence to the doctrine of immediate perception that allows Peirce to locate original interpretative action at the level of brute sensuous feeling without surrender neither to semiotic idealism nor to the empiricist sense data (Hausman, 1997:184). The “onion” metaphor serves as a reminder that there is no “thing-in-itself.” That is to say, that we can only know the human aspect of things (*SS* 141, 1911). But it is also unavoidable that Peirce acknowledged some pervasive constraining features of reality upon human cognition in his mature philosophy. So, *pace* Freedman, unlimited semiosis is actually “limited;” at least on the part of the dynamical object.

What is more, the double nature of the object—both *agent* and *patient* at the same time (*MS* 283, 1905)—raises an additional problem that tingles at the core of semiotic transparency. This leads us to the next section of the paper, in which the problem of mediation will be approached from the perspective of the sign as a *medium of communication*.

Semiotic transparency and determination

The “onion” metaphor, it was said before, shows that there is no onion without skin. But, ironically, it is possible to approach the same example from a different point of view. In his unpublished manuscript “The Basis of Pragmaticism,” Peirce gives us this wonderful passage:

What are signs for, anyhow? They are to communicate ideas, are they not? Even the imaginary signs called thoughts convey ideas from the mind of yesterday to the mind of tomorrow into which yesterday’s has grown. Of course, then, these “ideas” are not themselves “thoughts,” or imaginary signs. They are some potentiality, some form, which may be embodied in external or in internal signs (*EP* 2:388, 1906).

After saying that, Peirce asks if it is possible for this “form,” or idea-potentiality, to be poured from one vessel into another unceasingly. Obviously, the answer is no. Ideas, Peirce responds, do grow in this process. But we will return to this point later to see how this growth takes place by means of signs. What strikes me here is the uncanniness of Peirce’s language. Apparently, earlier emphases on representation, translation, and interpretation have changed into an oddly “transmissive” stance, in which ideas pass from mind to mind, embodying this

or that vehicle, but in the end flying away in spite of its accidental messenger. Later on, we encounter Peirce's metaphor again:

Metaphysics has been said contemptuously to be a fabric of metaphors. But not only metaphysics, but logical and phaneroscopic concepts need to be clothed in such garments. For a pure idea without metaphor or other significant clothing is an onion without a peel (*EP* 2:392, 1906).

But then, Peirce offers another fairly questionable metaphor for sign-action as “determination,” in which the community of quasi-minds is envisioned as the liquid contained in certain bottles connected by tubes. Peirce imagines an accident causing a chain of effects in one of the bottles, which in turn spreads this action to another bottle by means of its tube, and, through a causal sequence, to the rest of the bottles (*EP* 2:392, 1906). In this determinative perspective of semiosis, the dynamical object functions as the *determinant*, while the interpretant is the *determinand* (*MS* 499, n.d.). This is precisely the type of example that Richard Parmentier laments in Peirce's late concept of the sign as a medium of communication. According to Parmentier (1985:32), Peirce's communicative definition shows a regrettable tendency to emphasize the determinative aspect of semiosis.^{vi} As a consequence, in Peirce's later semeiotic, communicative mediation appears as being simply coexistent with the mere transfer of truth (Bergman, 2004:407). In other words, Peirce seems to express an ideal of semiotic transparency (Parmentier, 1985:43-44).

I will not take into account Parmentier's criticisms in detail. It will suffice to summarize his arguments, as depicted in Bergman (2004). Parmentier's main thesis is that Peirce's combination of the necessity of expression and the ideal of logical transparency brought an undesirable commitment to an idea of semiosis as mere delivery of form (Bergman, 2004:409). Peirce's controversial definition of the sign as a medium of communication came into view in the late 1900s. As Peirce says, “a sign is plainly a species of medium of communication” (*EP* 2:390, 1906). But what results even more challenging for Parmentier is another passage, also from 1906: “For the purposes of this inquiry a Sign may be defined as a Medium for the communication of a Form” (*MS* 793:1, 1906).

This form is *really* embodied in the object, meaning that the conditional relation which constitutes the form is *true* of the form as it is in the Object. In the Sign it is embodied only in a *representative* sense, meaning that whether by virtue of some real modification of the Sign, or otherwise, the Sign becomes endowed with the power of communicating it to an interpretant (*MS* 793, 1906).

As it was shown in “The Basis of Pragmaticism,” these forms are no more than vanishing possibilities without some kind of embodiment —let us remember, pure ideas are like “an onion without a peel,” mere potential forms without “efficiency” (*CP* 1.213). Thus, in order to gain any active mode of being, a form must be embodied in a sign (*EP* 2:388, 1906; *SS* 195, 1906). But Peirce also entails that this conveyance of forms must be as transparent as possible. The sign, Peirce says, is determined by the object in no other respect than to enable it to act upon the interpretant; and, —here we have the key— “the more perfectly it fulfills its function as a sign, the less effect it has upon that quasi-mind other than that of determining it as if the object itself had acted upon it” (*EP* 2:391, 1906). As André De Tienne puts it, “for Peirce, ideas should not be disrobed, otherwise they vanish into thin air (...) but the whole art is to make them as translucent as possible, like onion skin” (2003:39). Finally, Peirce seems to corroborate this bodily indifference when he suggests the perfect functioning of the sign would imply no latitude of interpretation at all (*EP* 2:351, 1905). In semeiotic mediation, the sign is desperately needed as a temporary vehicle, but as Parmentier concludes, it has no

relevance in the process of acquiring knowledge (1985:45). The communicated form must, as it were, bypass its transitory vessel.

Embodiment and Mediation: Towards a more robust philosophy of communication

As it has been shown in the preceding sections, Peirce's "onion" example is actually a puzzling metaphor for the elucidation of semeiotic mediation. Partly, I think, because the very idea of "mediation" is, in essence, the most difficult problem for semiotic inquiry. John Peters recounts a dramatic version of the story, characterized by the oscillation between a dream of transparency and the abysses of bodily encapsulation. As he nicely illustrates it, the *pathos* of communication in modern thinking teaches us an implacable lesson: "media become either bridges or obstacles" (1994:375). The idea of semiotic transparency, —which could be just another name for telepathic communication— is in the end a new cover for the old ideal of disembodied linkage; an ideal that too much frequently shows a desperate lack of concern to mediation as *transformation*.

If we accept Parmentier's conclusions, Peirce's mature semeiotic could be envisioned from this rather frustrating angle. In Peirce's late concept of the sign, communication has become disembodied: the presence of the medium ought to be as irrelevant as possible for the transmission of the form. According to Parmentier, Peirce is talking about ideas eternally bottled up inside temporary carcasses, as if perfect communication would involve the "disappearance of all media" (Peters, 1994:374). In this final section I would like to argue this is not the point at all. Furthermore, I will defend that Peirce's semeiotic is, in fact, a serious intent to incarnate spirit in a historical, somatic, and embodied bundle of communicative practices, without diminishing the universality and generality of the eternal forms they convey.

I think that Parmentier severely misreads the passage from *MS 793*. Although he provides a very good reconstruction of Peirce's thought, he surmounts important details and connections that would make the whole picture pretty much sympathetic to a relevant theory of mediation. It is true, the combination of the need for expression and the ideal of transparency implies an irreducible tension that turns Peirce's project into a theory of mediation *manqué*. But it is not necessary to accept both premises. Once the second premise is rejected, Peirce's account of mediation provides a sophisticated logic of embodiment. I will try to develop this argument in three concluding remarks. First of all, it would be useful to bear in mind that mediation is just another name for the third phaneroscopic category. Effectively, there is no need to repeat that, due to his refinements in both the logic of relations and his theory of categories, Peirce tended to prefer the term "Mediation" for the category of thought, generality, and representation or Thirdness: "Thirdness, in the sense of the category, is the same as mediation" (*CP* 1.328, c.1894). And again, in his "Harvard Lectures on Pragmatism," he says:

Thirdness is nothing but the character of an object which embodies Betweenness or Mediation in its simplest and most rudimentary form; and I use it as the name of that element of the phenomenon which is predominant wherever Mediation is predominant, and which reaches its fullness in Representation (*EP* 2:183, 1903).^{vii}

Now, Thirdness conceived as Mediation is also the category of law, growth, and continuity (cf. *EP* 2:160, 1903). In this sense, it is closely allied to synechism, the doctrine that all that exists is continuous. Vincent Potter (1997:87) articulates these relations in a clear and elegant way. First, provided that a Third is the "medium" or connecting bond between Firstness and Secondness, Thirdness is simply better characterized as Mediation. Second, Potter reminds

that in order for something to mediate, it must be both general and vague —namely, it must be neither of the extremes and yet partake of aspects of both a First and a Second. Finally, because of its generality, Thirdness must essentially refer to the future. So, genuine mediation requires three necessary conditions: 1) *continuity*; 2) *indeterminacy*, as illustrated in its two fundamental modes: *vagueness* and *generality*, and; 3) *futurity*, or purpose. These are precisely the conditions Peirce is calling for in his revision of pragmatism; for pragmatism “would essentially involve the establishment of the truth of synechism” (*EP* 2:335, 1905).

The second thing I would like to point out is a direct consequence of the former. Provided that synechism is closely related to pragmatism, —in the sense in which the pragmatist must admit *generals*, *laws*, and *continua* as real ingredients of reality— pragmatism itself must incorporate an adequate articulation of mediation. This is what signs, conceived as media of communication, actually do. My point is that both pragmatism and synechism are governed by a precise logic of mediation, and that we can find this logic in Peirce’s definitions of the sign as a medium of communication. Let us go back to the point in which Peirce asked for the possibility of forms to be poured from one vessel into another. In that manuscript, he defined forms as idea-potentialities. Perhaps, Peirce’s style was not sufficiently sophisticated there, and although it is actually full of brilliant suggestions, one cannot help feeling the same all along the whole manuscript. But maybe *MS* 793 —almost certainly a draft of the former—, as well as other manuscripts, might be of a better use.

It has been said that forms are idea-potentialities devoid of efficiency. In order to have efficiency at all, a form must be a real *general* embodying a sign. A further clarification will be needed here. In “The Logic of Mathematics” (*MS* 900, c. 1896) Peirce made an important distinction between a quality as a *mere possibility*, and a quality as *real potentiality*. The latter is no other thing than a “power,” what “might happen” given the suitable conditions (*CP* 1.422). In this sense, a real potentiality is not merely a logical possibility, but a real capacity to display physical effects. It is, in Potter’s words, a general “way of behaving” (1997:92). If I understand this correctly, this is simply the definition of a form:

That which is communicated from the Object through the Sign to the Interpretant is a Form; that is to say, it is nothing like an existent, but is a power, is the fact that something would happen under certain conditions.

(...)

The Being of a Form consists in the truth of a conditional proposition. Under given circumstances, something would be true (*MS* 793, 1906)

Now, in *MS* 774 Peirce identifies two requisites for communication. First, he says, the characters of the object represented by the sign should be of the nature of a sign. Consequently, these characters, which are independent of *such* particular representation, are not, however, independent of *all* representation. Secondly, an entirely new sign can never be created by an act of communication. On the contrary, the only possible thing is that a sign already existing should be filled and corrected (*EP* 2:328, 1904). In *MS* 793, Peirce’s use of the communicative definition of the sign clarifies the matter to a great extent. As Peirce suggested in *MS* 774, the “general secret of rendering signs effective” is no other thing than the capacity for a sign to generate successful interpretants (*EP* 2:326, 1904). That is precisely the role of the sign as a medium that communicates forms. As Peirce says, the form is *really* embodied in the object. To say that the form is “entitatively” in the object means that it is literally true of the object independently of the communication (*SS* 196, 1906). It is not a mere possibility waiting to be inherited, but a real potentiality, a dynamic “power” capable of

producing physical effects —namely, the interpretant. In this sense, the form has also the general nature of a sign and, therefore, it is not independent of *all* representation. Here we have the first requisite for communication. Then, the sign actually grasps the form emanated by the object, and, as a genuine medium, enables the interpretant to represent it, but in a more developed way. This is so because the interpretant, as a *nearly equivalent* representation of the sign, not only receives the form, but represents it in a slightly different guise (*SS* 196, 1906). This is the second requisite. Moreover, as Bergman suggests, despite the form is truly *real*, it cannot *exist* as such (2004:408). In the end, there is only this *continuous* process of mediation in which forms are constantly developed and transformed in order to represent the object in a more developed way.

But how does this extended quotation connect with Peirce's pragmatism? This question leads to the third closing remark of my paper. I agree with Giovanni Maddalena that in the late period of his career, Peirce gathered serious doubts on pragmatism, which he considered to be insufficient to grasp the whole realm of logic. It is also true that synechism was envisioned by Peirce as a richer metaphysical system, in which the principles of semeiotic, —conceived now as a sort of “logic objectified,”— govern the evolutionary development of the Universe. In this broader picture, Peirce described the Universe as having the structure of a symbol —a vast representamen of God's purpose— working out its conclusions in living realities (*EP* 2:193, 1903). Being of the nature of a symbol, the Universe is always indeterminate, and as such, it is always growing in a process of increasing determination (*EP* 2:322, 1904). By a process of determination Peirce meant the process of generating new interpretants, of increasing *generality* and *mediation* throughout all the realms of being.

We, human creatures, are symbols too, and as such, we are part of this evolving process. In fact, it is part of our ethic, —even more, aesthetic— duties to contribute to the reasonable evolution of the Universe. As breathing symbols, it is our responsibility to take the forms communicated by the object and transform them without betrayal to its governing purpose. In passing from the object to the interpretant through the sign, the forms ought to be transformed; otherwise there could not be growth in information. But the sign must accomplish this mission in a very cautious way. There must be an appearance of transparency, “as if the object itself had acted upon” the interpretant. This is, no doubt, the ideal of transparency denounced by Parmentier. On the other side, we have seen that forms are not mere intangible ideas waving into the void, but living powers capable of producing real effects in the world. “Ideas do, no doubt, grow” (*EP* 2:388, 1906). It can be concluded that Peirce's supposed commitment to semiotic transparency is just a normative requirement in order not to deceive the ultimate purpose of signs: the preservation of Truth. But this ethical principle does not imply that real mediation is committed to actual transparency. Parmentier's second premise is easily defeated, and, for that reason, his argument must be rejected.

In Peirce's semeiotic, general forms are not indifferent to its bodily incarnation. As Hulswit puts it, forms cannot be explicated without pragmatic contexts and normative criteria for the concrete application of signs (2002:205). This is nothing but to admit the full meaning of pragmatism: by acquiring higher grades of self-control, we must embody more and more those living forms and transform them into reasonable conduct (*EP* 2:343, 1905). I think this is, in fact, a quite reasonable way to explain both the materiality and spirituality of human communication.

Notes

ⁱ See C. S. Peirce, “Criticism on *Phantasms of the Living*: An Examination of an Argument of Messrs. Gurney, Myers, and Podmore,” *W* 6:74-81, 1887.

ⁱⁱ F. W. H. Myers, *Proceedings of the Society for Psychological Research* 1, 2, 1882:147, quoted in J. D. Peters (1999: 105).

ⁱⁱⁱ Peirce himself worked on psychical research during the year 1887. There is also a seminal manuscript from 1903, “Telepathy and Perception,” in which Peirce first introduced the concept of *percipuum*. Cf. *CP* 7.597-688.

^{iv} As far as I know, only Hausman (1997), Freadman (2004), and Bergman (2007) have offered reasonably extended remarks on the referred quotation.

^v Cf. also David Savan’s position (1983) for a view on Peirce as a semiotic idealist.

^{vi} Determination is a very intricate notion that, unfortunately, does not receive a coherent treatment by Peirce. There are, at least, three different senses in which Peirce uses the term “determination.” First, determination is the logical process of adding predicates by which the logical depth, or comprehension of a concept is increased (*CP* 4.428, 1893). This process is characterized by the specification of certain attributes of a term. In this sense, a term can be determined in this or that aspect, but it is not possible for a term to be absolutely determined in all aspects. Second, determination is also the causal process by which the sign is said to be determined (*bestimmt*) by its object in a particular manner (*CP* 8.344, 1908). Short (1981) has argued this sense of determination is better understood as some objective constraints the dynamical object exerts upon the sign, hence delimiting its possible interpretations. Thirdly, as Bergman (2004) notes, there is another sense, closely related to the other two, in which Peirce clarifies the meaning of determination in a pragmatic vein. In this sense, it has to do with the reduction of indeterminacy in communicative situations with respect to the achievement of a purpose (*EP* 2:393, 1906).

^{vii} Moreover, Peirce even says that the term “representation” is not general enough to account for the third category: “The word mediation would be better” (*CP* 4.3, 1898).

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