

# Peirce's Semeiotic Applied to Perception – The Role of Dynamic Objects and Percepts in Perceptual Interpretation

## *A Semiótica de Peirce Aplicada à Percepção – O Papel dos Objetos Dinâmicos e dos Perceptos na Interpretação Perceptiva*

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**Abstract:** The opposition between the views that we create reality and reality is discovered may be bridged by means of one component of Peirce's semeiotic. I offer a defense of the distinction between pre-interpreted and interpreted objects, that is, between what Peirce called dynamic objects and immediate objects. Throughout his career, Peirce affirmed the importance of what he called "the outward clash," which is his dramatic description of the role of real or dynamic objects that prompt the formulation of signs and the interpretations that refer to their objects. Thus, although the aim of interpretation is the immediate object, the cognitive object formed by the interpretation, the process of developing the immediate object is subjected to constraints, some of which come from the side of the dynamic objects.

As an entry into this view of interpretation, I discuss some misleading ways of understanding what Peirce's references to the objects of signs are. A useful way to avoid misunderstanding, I suggest, is to substitute the term "referent" for "object." When this is done, it may be argued that there are dynamic objects even for signs that are fictions. However, for the purposes of this discussion, my primary aim is to suggest an application of the semeiotic of immediate and dynamic objects to Peirce's account of the formation of perceptual judgments. Perception begins with percepts and develops through stages of interpretive processes that aim at forming perceptual judgments. I propose that percepts are experienced manifestations of dynamic objects so that considering how percepts constrain perceptual interpretation may help in giving an account of the function of dynamic objects in general.

**Keywords:** Immediate and dynamic object. Percept. Percipuum. Perceptual judgment. Reference and referent.

**Resumo:** *A oposição entre a visão de que criamos a realidade e a de que a realidade é descoberta pode ser superada por meio de um componente da semiótica de Peirce. Ofereço uma defesa da distinção entre objetos pré-interpretados e objetos interpretados, isto é, entre o que Peirce chamava de objetos dinâmicos e objetos imediatos. Ao longo de sua carreira, Peirce afirmou a importância daquilo que ele chamava de "choque com o mundo externo",*

*que é sua descrição dramática do papel dos objetos reais ou dinâmicos que impelem à formação de signos e interpretações que referem a seus objetos. Assim, embora a meta da interpretação seja o objeto imediato, o objeto cognitivo formado pela interpretação, o processo de desenvolver o objeto imediato está sujeito a restrições, algumas das quais vêm do lado dos objetos dinâmicos.*

*Como uma introdução a essa visão de interpretação, discuto algumas maneiras equivocadas de entender o que são as referências de Peirce aos objetos dos signos. Um caminho útil para evitar mal-entendidos, sugiro, é substituir o termo “referente” por “objeto”. Quando se faz isso, pode-se argumentar haver objetos dinâmicos mesmo para signos que são ficções. Entretanto, para os propósitos desta discussão, meu objetivo primeiro é sugerir uma aplicação da semiótica dos objetos dinâmicos e imediatos à abordagem peirceana da formação dos juízos perceptivos. A percepção começa com perceptos que almejam formar juízos perceptivos. Proponho que os perceptos são manifestações experienciadas de objetos dinâmicos, de modo que a consideração de como os perceptos constroem a interpretação perceptiva possa ajudar a construir uma abordagem da função dos objetos dinâmicos em geral.*

**Palavras-chave:** Objeto imediato e objeto dinâmico. Percepto. Percipuum. Juízo perceptivo. Referência e referente.

Interpretation is *of* or *about* something interpreted. Interpretations are referential and occur in a relation of reference, and the reference is to a referent. In the following remarks, I shall be concerned with the way constraints contribute to the adequacy of interpretive processes in determining the identity of the referent. This question signals a topic that concerned Charles Peirce, not only in his semeiotic, but also in his philosophy in general.<sup>1</sup> I would like to consider a way some of the ideas set forth in Peirce's semeiotic help show how constraints enter interpretation. I shall then extend some of my former suggestions for pursuing this issue, which point the way to mediate between two apparently opposing views. One view claims that interpretation creates its referent; the other view affirms a realism, according to which there is an independent, determinate world that interpretation must match.

My version of Peirce's view proposes that although context and previous habits affect interpretation, there is also an indeterminate condition, which, in some respects, is independent of thought so that it constrains and thus limits the hegemony of interpretation over its object. Thus, Peirce's ideas show a way to mediate between conceptual and linguistic insulation and the view that an independent world of external constraints has the final say on interpretation. Peircean realism acknowledges the creative aspect of interpretation as well as the resistance of evolving external constraints. As a way of bolstering these ideas and at the same time trying to throw new light on Peirce's theory of perception, I want to add a brief account of how the percept, which is Peirce's initiating experience in the formation of a perceptual judgment, is counterpart to his view of how the object of interpretation functions. Because interpretations are also

<sup>1</sup> The spelling of the word, “semeiotic,” is adopted in deference to Peirce's preferred spelling.

crucial in art criticism, I shall add some brief remarks about objective conditions with respect to the objects or art criticism. However, before turning to these ideas, I want to make clear that I acknowledge the necessity of recognizing that there are crucial general conditions that apparently affect all interpretations.

## Influences on Interpretation

It seems incontrovertible that assumptions and funded experience influence interpretation. In science, these presupposed conditions include accepted theories, axioms, arguments and discussions with colleagues, and whole networks of thoughts about which scientists generally agree — and disagree. In the visual arts, assumptions include assumed canons (which change over time), accepted prior interpretations that inform art historians and art critics, and individual tastes of each critic. Similar conditions affect literary interpretations and interpretations of music. In addition, the presupposed constraining conditions include acknowledged as well as tacit prejudices or persuasions about what is to be expected in a culture. These, of course, include memories and consciously recognized and even unconscious prejudices and persuasions that resulted from previous interpretations

The assumptions with which interpreters approach their objects, however, do not make up all that influences interpretations. Following some of Peirce's insights, as mentioned a moment ago, I shall try to show how an objective, "dynamic" aspect of the object to be interpreted functions as a constraining condition. This objective factor interacts with the interpreter's assumptions during the process of interpretation. All these considerations depend on Peirce's semeiotic, and it is necessary to summarize it, although obviously a summary necessarily misses most of the complexity and subtlety in Peirce's own accounts.

## A Summary of Peirce's Semeiotic

Since I am concerned with the objectivity called for in Peirce's semeiotic, I should point out that this objectivity is emphasized early in his career in two passages in his review of Royce's *Religious Aspect of Philosophy*. Peirce says that indispensable to all aspects of reasoning is the index. The index "exercises a real physiological *force* over attention," and it "must enter into every proposition" (8.41) A bit later, he criticizes Hegel, saying that "The capital error of Hegel which permeates his whole system in every part of it is that he almost altogether ignores the Outward Clash."<sup>2</sup> The function of the index and the source of the "Outward Clash" are best introduced in the following summary of Peirce's semeiotic.

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<sup>2</sup> Both passages are in "An American Plato: Review of Royce's Religious Aspect of Philosophy", p. 232-233, in *The Essential Peirce*, v. I. Ed.: Nathan Houser and Christian Kloesel (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1992). References to *Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce* follow the standard volume number followed by a period and the paragraph number in parentheses.

The overall structure of Peirce's theory of meaning is triadic. There are three terms related to one another: the sign, its object or referent, and an interpretation or interpretant. Intelligible or cognitive meaning requires these three terms. The sign refers to its object *for* an interpretation. The sign means its object through an interpretation. At the same time, interpretation requires a sign referring to its object. The products of interpretations Peirce calls *immediate objects*. These are the objects, which initiated interpretation, as they have been interpreted.

An interpretation inevitably gives rise to or implies further interpretation. Thus, each interpretation becomes a sign for another interpretation, and a system of interpretations, which become signs, evolves from the initial one. Interpretations, then, in general, are semeiotic processes that presuppose systems of signs, loose or well organized. The system provides a semeiotic context of signs consisting of previous interpretations or immediate objects. But the entire interpretive process necessarily must be relevant to referents. It must not be overlooked that the continued interpretations are aiming at determining a final immediate object. It is crucial, then, to focus on Peirce's conception of the role of objects in interpretation.

## Semeiotic Objects

Although interpretations aim at immediate objects, they must begin with objects that need to be interpreted. This object is pre-interpreted and thus *precedes* the immediate object. Thus, interpretation addresses a twofold object. As Peirce put it,

[A] Sign has an Object and an Interpretant, the latter being that which the Sign produces in the Quasi-mind that is the Interpreter, [...] But it remains to point out that there are usually two Objects. [...] Namely, we have to distinguish the Immediate Object, which is the Object as the Sign itself represents it, and whose Being is thus dependent upon the Representation of it in the Sign, from the Dynamical Object, which is the Reality which by some means contrives to determine the Sign. (4.536)

On the one hand, there is the *dynamic object*. This is the initiating "thing" to be interpreted. On the other hand, there is the immediate object. This is the dynamic object once interpreted. And it seems obvious that the interpreted object is what immediately serves as the basis for the ongoing evolution of interpretations. Accordingly, the assumed system that is brought to, even imposed on, the beginning of an interpretation consists of immediate objects. But, again, there would be no immediate object if there were not the fundamental initiating, dynamic, object.

Let me offer an example that is much like one that others and I have used in the past. A spot appearing on the horizon of the sea catches an observer's attention and the observer begins to interpret it. In the context of this semeiosis or interpretive process, the spot would serve as the dynamic object. Suppose that the developing interpretation determines that the shape of the spot is a ship. What develops, then, is an immediate object — the dynamic object *as interpreted*, or in this case, the object that is *being* interpreted. Continued observation might lead to a different interpretation. As the tide brings the spot closer, it may appear to be a log rather than a ship. And a bit later when brought even closer, it might be interpreted as an unusually large mass of seaweed.

Thus, a series of immediate objects would develop during the entire semeiosis. However, what can be said about the “thing” that initiated the interpretation? What can be said about it apart from or what interpretation decides can be said about it?

One might insist, assuming the most extreme view, that the only access we have to the object shows it to be *nothing but* the latest immediate object. If this conclusion stands, then one's epistemology, and in turn one's ontology, would affirm that we, the interpreters, construct or create what we interpret. On this view, there is no object that is independent of the interpretation. The exclusion of an object in itself is, of course, consistent with some of Peirce's early rejections of the idea of the Kantian notion of a thing-in-itself. However, Peirce did not reject the idea of an unknowable thing in itself only to replace it with a thorough idealism such that minds create the dynamic objects that they interpret. If he had, reality for him, as the extreme idealism suggests, would consist exclusively of immediate objects, which is inconsistent with the outward clash Peirce claimed was missing in Hegel. Moreover, Peirce did not say that dynamic objects do not undergo some modification through interaction with interpretive acts and thus with immediate objects. This point is implied in Peirce's choice of the term “dynamic.” The dynamic character attributed to the object indicates that the object is not inert. It need be neither completely passive nor unchanging as a source of constraint. It interacts with interpretation so that the outcome is an evolving immediate object. Thus, at any stage of interpretation, the immediate object must be an outcome of an interaction, an interaction or mutual constraints of interpreter and the dynamic function or constrains having their source in the dynamic object.

In this capacity, the dynamic object functions by means of constraints that nudge the interpreter toward different directions that interpretation might take. In a discussion of creative activity, Vincent Tomas offered a forceful figure in saying that in a creative process, at least in the case of artists, there are often kicks that prevent the creator from going in one direction rather than another. This figuratively emphasizes that there are negative moments in interpretation when constraints point the interpreter away from some possible advance. But this is to close off at least one direction and let the process advance in some other direction. An example might be a case in which an interpreter of Picasso's *Guernica* would begin with the idea that the painting expresses the theme of a bullfight. This would, I should think, be followed by a constraint, once the interpreter looked carefully at the images and the lines and shapes that interact in forming the images. I suggest that the interpreter would then be nudged toward finding expressions of the violence and discord of war. Undoubtedly, a more developed account of my claims is needed, and I hope to provide that as the discussion proceeds.

There are two issues that are directly related to the purposes of this discussion. The first has to do with distinguishing the dynamic object from the immediate object during the interpretive process. How can we know when we have identified the dynamical object? The second issue concerns whether every sign has a dynamical object as its referent. Both of these suggest an overlapping issue concerning the question whether Peirce regards the determining object as internal rather than external. If it is internal only, then I think that he must withdraw his objection to Hegel's neglect of the outward clash.

Before addressing each issue, I shall anticipate my response to the second by claiming that the issue arises in large part because of the tendency of some interpreters to assume that semeiotic objects have the status of physical things or events. Menno

Hulswit has shown that such a limitation misses Peirce's larger view. Hulswit cites several quotations from an important Peirce manuscript<sup>3</sup> in which Peirce says that dynamic objects may consist of general ideas, potentialities, or possibilities. In his words,

The Objects — for a Sign may have any number of them — may each be a single known thing or thing believed formerly to have existed or expected to exist, or a collection of such things, or a known quality or relation of fact [...] or something of a general nature desired, required, or invariably found under certain general circumstances. (2.232)

The result of narrowing real objects to physical things and events is a conflation of dynamic objects with immediate objects. However, I must consider the two issues in order.

## First Issue

The first issue focuses on how to distinguish immediate objects from dynamic objects. This is a problem that seems to me to arise in at least one account that makes use of illustrations, such as I used earlier, of interpreting a spot on the horizon. For instance, in a closely argued book about Peirce, Christopher HOOKWAY offers an illustration of how “a real object” may be misinterpreted.<sup>4</sup>

Seeing a shape in the distance, an interpreter believes that it is a sheep. Suppose that the interpreter says, “Looking at a distant hillside [...] I judge that the sheep next to the tree has not moved [...] Suppose that in fact I am looking at a bush. [...] In spite of this error, there is a sense in which I know what I am thinking or talking about. [...] This is because my judgement is sensitive to further information about the object. [...] I might walk up to the ‘sheep’ in order to see it better [...]” (p. 126-7), and at this point, the discovery that it is a bush would be made.

Hookway's account suggests that the final interpretation, the bush, is the real or dynamical object — as he puts it, the bush turns out to be “what the object really is.”

However, the problem I have with this account is that the object interpreted as a bush is, after all, an immediate object: it is the dynamic object *as interpreted*. Has the dynamic object then been assimilated into the immediate object? Or can any more be said about what the object that has been interpreted is? If so, anything more would be interpretation and thus an extension of the immediate object. Suppose that on even closer examination, the bush moves and is then seen as a bear. Is the bear the dynamic object? This seems to follow if we can only say what the dynamic object is in terms of an

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<sup>3</sup> HULSWIT, Menno. *A Semeiotic Account of Causation* (Hengstalsweg 156, 6523 ER. Nijmegen, 1998, p. 149-154). The quotation from Peirce is from Peirce's *Collected Papers*; an important segment of Peirce's discussions of semeiotics and its components in the triadic structure can be found in his MS 318,00082-83, 1907.

<sup>4</sup> This illustration is offered by Christopher Hookway's important, in a relatively recent book, *Truth, Rationality, and Pragmatism: Themes from Peirce* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

immediate object. Thus, on Hookway's account, the dynamic object could only be the most recent immediate object. However, in that case, obviously, the distinction between the two objects of interpretation, or the idea that referents of interpretation are twofold, vanishes. And without the persistence of the dynamic object, Peirce's account loses its ontological ground. Or rather, it devolves into a semeiotic idealism in which the dynamic object is at most a device for justifying persistent inquiry.

The point is not that we are unable to assert during an interpretation what the dynamic object "really" is. The point is that we can only describe the most recent immediate object that *functioned* as a dynamic object. Only in this respect, can we refer to what we call the real or dynamic object. Thus, what is attributed to the object is its cognitive status, and in that sense, it is an immediate object. As the last interpreted object, it has functioned as the dynamic object. However, the formal identification of the dynamic object as the last immediate object that terminated interpretation is not the only criterion for identifying dynamic objects. The dynamic object also is the source of the felt force of the immediate object that is functioning as a dynamic object. Objects during interpretation not only occur sequentially but objects are presented with forces that are experienced in the constraints that have their origin "outside" or independently of the minds of the interpreters. In this way, interpreters, are constrained and nudged away from and sometimes led toward other directions of interpretation. This point, I think, is at least partially confirmed in the following quotation from one of Peirce's letters to Lady Welby: "By the way, the dynamical object does not mean something out of the mind. It means something forced upon the mind in perception, but including more than perception reveals".<sup>5</sup> When Peirce says that the dynamical object does not mean something out of the mind I take him to indicate his opposition to something external and determinate to which the mind has no access, that is, a thing in itself. Thus, there is a sense of externality experienced as the resistance and force of the object of perception. This Peirce elsewhere calls the percept. Percepts set the interpretive process in motion and prompt interpreters to form perceptual judgments. Percepts are obviously present to attention and therefore to that extent internal. But Peirce also says that the objects, the percepts, are forced upon the mind and that they include "something more" than perception reveals. Thus, there must be some externality associated with the objects of perception. I shall not pursue this here, because the role of percepts and their association with dynamical objects will be the main topic of the application of the discussion thus far.

However, let me return to and summarize my proposal that immediate and dynamic objects must be distinguished functionally. In short, I claim that any attempt to assign attributes to dynamic objects is to give them determinateness as immediate objects. Thus we cannot avoid thinking about "real" objects as interpreted objects functioning as dynamical objects — as if we had conquered the forces of the dynamic objects. Nevertheless, something more *can* be said about dynamic objects in their pre-interpreted status. They are *that which initiates and to some extent constrains* the interpretation throughout its development. Any suggestion that the object has properties necessitates its initial transformation into an immediate object. Further, if its function is to be what will become the real object, then it provides some external, "outward clash," some force that exceeds what is immediately apparent in our experience.

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<sup>5</sup> A letter to Lady Welby, Spring 1906, reprinted in *The Essential Peirce*, p. 478.

## Second Issue: Does Every Sign Have an Object?

The second issue, whether every sign has an object, specifically a dynamic object, has been raised when Peirce's semeiotic is applied to fictions and works of art. As mentioned above, one of the reasons Peirce scholars have dwelled on this question may be that the term "object" is assumed to refer only to something with spatial-temporal properties or at least something external to the constructs of art.<sup>6</sup> This assumption about the reference of "object" might be avoided, or the issue sidestepped, if the word "referent" were substituted for "object," and the functional view is adopted. A fiction, then, has a referent, whether one calls it an object in the sense of intentional object or fictional object. There is no centaur if centaurs are considered spatial-temporal things that can be photographed. But a referent need not be something capable of being photographed. A representational painting of a fantastic monster has a referent, something that can be described and that is a construction based on other existing things that can be described. In addition, an abstract or non-objective painting may have a referent, at least insofar as it exhibits insights into society, individual experiences, life, or "reality." That to which the work exhibits an insight functions as a referent, which is a condition of constraint. Liszka (see note 6 above) refers to Peirce's suggestion that fictional objects are "implied," which may be his way of saying that say, the word "Hamlet" in Shakespeare's drama refers to an imaginary abstraction functioning in the way space-time objects function for attention. Obviously much more needs to be developed to make my point. But whether fictional referents have dynamic objects need not be settled in order to support my claims about dynamic objects, at least in the context of interpretation in perception. In any case, I shall use the term "referent" as well as "object" interchangeably.

## The Functions of Dynamic Objects

My hypothesis, then, is that immediate objects can function as dynamic objects when those immediate objects are referents constraining interpretation that provisionally is assumed complete. In the case of the spot on the horizon, continued observation may show it to be a boat, and still further observation may call for revision so that the boat is then seen to be a gigantic log. Persuasions initially assumed by the interpreter that are brought to bear on interpretations exhaustive. The constraints of the dynamic side interact with them. The spot functioned initially as a dynamic referent, for it reacted against the visual capacities of the observers, insisting to them that it was something intelligible and therefore in need of interpretation. Throughout the stages of interpretation, first the spot, then the boat functioned as dynamic objects, and later the log functioned dynamically in another revision according to which the log was seen as large mass of seaweed. However, along with each stage, what originally constrained the observer's seeing it as a dot, even if it evolves as it interacts with interpreters, is still present as a constraining

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<sup>6</sup> James K. Liszka provides a close examination of different claims about whether signs have dynamic objects. See *A General Introduction to the Semeiotic of Charles Sander Peirce* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1996), especially p.113.

condition pressing interpretations onward. Thus, even to recognize what is called a spot as a spot is at least an incipient interpretation. Such initial interpretation is possible because the example being discussed is in a language and within a framework of assumed experience of sightings at sea and recognizing spots.

As suggested, whatever it was that initiated even the statement that there is a spot on the horizon is the dynamic condition that constrains perception to see it as a spot on the horizon rather than a floater in my eye, or an insect stopped momentarily in front of me. This condition does not vanish with each immediate object, otherwise revision would not occur. Consequently, the object first seen as a spot on the horizon and later seen as a log is not interpreted as something else because of constraints that continue to impose themselves on interpretation and interact with the agency of interpretation.

One might insist that these constraints have their source or their loci in the interpreter, in a subconscious dimension of mind, perhaps in a collective unconscious, in the universal structure of all minds, in Mind or an absolute intelligence, or in unrecognized physical changes in the body. Nevertheless, the *function* of the object as seen would be something independent of the deliberate and conscious activity of interpretation. I cannot here consider the ontological question that is raised if someone claimed that all constraints are fundamentally mental or are the responsibility of an Absolute Mind. However, what is of importance for what follows is an application of what I have suggested above to Peirce's account of the formation of perceptual judgments.

## Percepts and Constraints in Perception

At what stage does the pre-interpreted begin to be interpreted, and how does the pre-interpreted function as a way in which interpretation is constrained? It should be helpful in answering these questions to turn to Peirce's analysis of perceptual judgment, which begins with a percept, evolves into the judgment through what Peirce calls the percipuum and is terminated when the judgment refers to the interpreted percept insofar as it has been given provisional determination. Thus, we must consider Peirce's ideas about the way perceptual judgments are formed. I claim that the analysis of perception exemplifies epistemologically his semeiotic account of interpretation. How, then, is interpretation initiated and developed once the a perceptual process of interpretation begins?

It seems clear that our encounters with that which prompts us to form perceptual judgments are percepts. There is confirmation of this in a passage. In a rather early writing, Peirce points out how a percept is experienced. He says, "Deceive yourself as you may, you have a direct experience of something reacting against you" (2.139). The something, then, is not controlled or dependent on one's opinion. "The knowledge which you are compelled to admit is that knowledge which is directly forced upon you, and which there is no criticizing ..." (2.141). What is specifically important here is that in the same paragraph, Peirce adds that his discussion is about "an imperfect description of the percept that is forced upon me ..." (2.141). The experience of a percept, then, must be intimately related to, if not identical with, what Peirce believes to be an experience of a dynamic object.

Another way to view this experience is to observe that it falls under the category of Secondness, which is a dyadic, pre-cognitive and therefore pre-interpreted. It should

be noted, however, that Peirce says that what we are compelled to admit is called *knowledge* that is directly forced on the interpreter. Peirce seems to have in mind that the condition of compulsion incites and *directs* the interpreter toward the interpretation, which is knowledge. I think this is borne out in Peirce's explanation of the way perceptual judgments are initiated and developed. A series of passages from Volume 7 of the Collected Papers contain his relatively detailed account of perceptual interpretation. For illustration, Peirce says,

Let us say that, as I sit here writing, I see on the other side of my table, a yellow chair with a green cushion. That will be what psychologists term a "percept" (*res percepta*). [...] The chair I appear to see makes no professions of any kind, essentially embodies no intentions of any kind, does not stand for anything. It obtrudes itself upon my gaze; but not as a deputy for anything else, not "as" anything (7.619) [...] Such is the percept. Now what is its logical bearing upon knowledge and belief? This may be summed up in three items, as follows:

1st, it contributes something positive. (Thus, the chair has its four legs, seat, and back, its yellow color, its green cushion, etc. To learn this is a contribution to knowledge.)

2nd, it compels the perceiver to acknowledge it.

3rd, it neither offers any reason for such acknowledgment nor makes any pretension to reasonableness. This last point distinguishes the percept from an axiom. (7.622)

The three items raise the crucial issue: how can something that is itself blind, unrepresentative, and has no reasonableness contribute something positive to knowledge? On the one hand, we have the percept, and on the other hand, we have the perceptual judgment, which is the beginning of knowledge, if not knowledge. "We know nothing about the percept otherwise than by testimony of the perceptual judgment, excepting that we feel the blow of it, [...] But the moment we fix our minds upon it and think the least thing about the percept, it is the perceptual judgment that tells us what we so 'perceive'" (7.643). Thus, the originating percept does not initially appear with four legs, as chair, or "as anything." The percept is transformed as it is taken up into the interpretive process. However, Peirce suggests a way to account for the transformation. "For this and other reasons, I propose to consider the percept as it is immediately interpreted in the perceptual judgment, under the name of the 'percipuum'." There is, then, a stage, the percipuum, mediating the initial percept and the judgment. Since Peirce says that the percipuum is the percept as immediately interpreted, I think it is reasonable to conclude that the percipuum is the epistemological version of the immediate object *as it begins to take form*. I assume that an immediate object, as Peirce defined it within the semeiotic, is the object as represented, or at the end of a specific act of interpretation. And I take this to be the percept interpreted — illustrated by the yellow chair in Peirce's example, which is the object of a perceptual judgment, which, as he puts it, "tells us what we so 'perceive'. But this judgment depends on "the percipuum [which] is what forces itself upon your acknowledgment, without any why or wherefore" (7.643). We recognize it *as* something before predicating anything of it. The percipuum is a stage that evolves in the perceptual experience and thus is a kind of bridge to relating it to other perceptions and perceptual judgments. The distinction here may seem fragile. Nevertheless, it is important for the view that immediate objects, before

being related to anything, are interpretations accepted without yet any mediation further than the interpretation to which the dynamic object had been subjected.

Thus, the point of my proposal about percepts, immediate objects, and perceptual judgments depends on how much one expects of the interpretation required to bring about the immediate object. The immediate object is something that is an *immediate* interpretation of the dynamic object. It may afterwards be qualified and caught up in a semeiotic process, in a mediatedly interpreted system or web of immediate objects. Then, like the percipuum, it would no longer be something that simply “immediately forces itself” on one; it would then be something over which there is some cognitive control. However, prior to this control, there is that which is *immediately* interpreted in the sense of being an “acknowledgment” of *what* is there, but not why it is what it is. I am proposing that this is the status of the immediate object rather than the mediated object.

We still are faced with the issue I raised concerning the percept that initiates the process of evolving toward the judgment — now, as pointed out, evolving through the percipuum. There must be something about percepts, or there must be additional stages of semeiosis, that at least *nudge* the acknowledgment and interpretation — something that gives a kind of impetus to the growth of the percipuum.

Peirce refers to two kinds of refinements of the perceptual process that are relevant to this issue. The first is a pair that opens up the discussion to his broadest perspective, that is, his categorial description of all experience. This refinement can be seen in the following quotation:

Let us say, then, that anything is, for the purposes of logic, to be classed under the species of perception wherein a positive qualitative content is forced upon one's acknowledgment without any reason or pretension to reason. There will be a wider genus of things partaking of the character of perception, if there be any matter of cognition which exerts a force upon us tending to make us acknowledge it without any adequate reason. (7.623)

“Perception” here, I take it, refers to the total process from percept to perceptual judgment. Within this process, we are told that there is a “positive qualitative content” which is without reason, without cognitive character, but which is not so blind as to disclose nothing in the experience. Further, there is a force “*tending*” to make us acknowledge qualitative content. Quality and force, then, apparently are two aspects of percepts that, as Peirce says two paragraphs later, can be separated in thought, presumably after interpretation has been initiated (7.625). It seems obvious that these two aspects of percepts fall under Peirce's categories of Firstness and Secondness — of qualitative tone and resistance and force. This appeal to the two categories is confirmed explicitly:

Thus, two utterly different kinds of elements go to compose any percept. In the first place, there are the qualities of feeling or sensation, each of which is something positive and *sui generis*, being such as it is quite regardless of how or what anything else is. On account of this self-sufficiency, it is convenient to call these the elements of “Firstness.”<sup>8</sup> In the percept, these elements of Firstness are perceived to be connected in definite ways. A visual percept of a chair has a definite shape. If it is yellow with a green cushion, that is quite different from being green with a yellow cushion. These connectives are directly perceived, and the perception of each of them is a perception at once of two opposed

objects, – a double awareness. In respect to each of these connections, one part of the percept appears as it does relatively to a second part. Hence, it is convenient to call them elements of “Secondness.” The vividness with which a percept stands out is an element of secondness; because the percept is vivid in proportion to the intensity of its effect upon the perceiver. These elements of secondness bring with them the peculiar singleness of the percept. (7.625)

Putting the categorial application in alternative terms, the interpretive process introduces monadic and dyadic relations that function in perception or interpretation in general as preliminary to Triadic relation, which is reached when a cognitive aspect has raised percept to the control of critical judgment, or dynamic object to immediate objects known through mediation. These observations about the relevance of the categories do not advance the consideration of how the percept nudges a process toward a percipuum. But they do show that the different kinds of problems and topics Peirce addressed are interlinked. Furthermore, the suggestion that there is an intrusion of Seconds or dyadic relations in percepts shows that percepts have functions that are not restricted to simply being monads or Firsts as singulars isolated and wholly self-contained.

Peirce probes further in discussing the ways percepts may initiate interpretation. He suggests that given with the percept there is “near anticipation,” or “the antecept” and “the recent memory,” or “the ponecept.” He also raises the question whether such distinctions should be permitted in view of his insistence on the principle of continuity, which is affirmed in metaphysical proposals as synechism. Here, he refers to “the serial principle”:

It is a difficult question whether the serial principle permits us to draw sharp lines of demarcation between the percept and the near anticipation, or say the antecept, and between the percept and the recent memory (may I be permitted to call this the ponecept, a distant and dubious memory being perhaps quite another thing?), or whether the percept is at once but an extreme case of an antecept and an extreme case of a ponecept. (7.648)

This passage adds two additional stages that Peirce says are relevant to connecting percepts to perceptual judgments, and it makes clear that although there may be assumed and felt stages that show how percepts link to oncoming interpretations, the entire process is a continuum, which will be recognized as central to Peirce’s synechism. The act of identifying stages of interpretation is, I think, what Peirce, early in his career, called a kind of abstraction, that is, a prescinding of what is a logically supposed condition for a more complex experience. That which is abstracted is not to be equated with the richer, continuous experience to which the mind has attended. In the present context, the idea of prescinding indicates that for Peirce, the process initiated by the percept and an interaction with it can be an object of reflection, no matter how powerful its brute forcefulness.

The problem here, of course, is common to all attempts to analyze or describe what is felt, what is sheer presence, not as a datum, which is an abstraction and not as a series of data, but as a vague but qualitative experience. To describe it is to turn on it and try to capture something that was here but is not gone as an immediate experience. Peirce emphasized this problem when he describes Firstness in his phenomenology. Of concern here is the way Peirce addresses the relation between pre-cognitive percepts and the transitional development to cognitive interpretation. Our focus, then, must be

on the two added stages, antecept and ponecept, that are directly related to the percept. Peirce makes it clear that the antecept and the ponecept are not internal to the percept. After all, the antecept and ponecept are described in terms of mental processes of anticipation and memory, which have their loci in the interpreting agent. Furthermore, Peirce refers to one of the origins of the term “percept” as found in psychology. And he attributes the term “percept” to a concern of psychologists.

However, Peirce does not consider his project identical with that of psychology. An objectively appearing force comes with the anticipation of the antecept, that is, a recognition of a future and the possibility of prediction. Similarly, memories are not consciously varied at will without deliberate purpose.

It should be noted that Peirce adds the two terms while cautioning against “drawing a sharp line” between the percept and either the antecept or the ponecept, and he suggests that the percept may be an extreme case of each. It is clear, then, that he regards the entire passage from percept to judgment as an event in a continuum, and the percept must be an extreme case of antecept and ponecept. It does not, however, follow that the percept is not a distinct objective presence. It does not lose its status of externality as a constraining condition that presses on interpreters a force and a resistance. At the same time, the percept is not taken up as an independent condition the characteristics of which are discovered in interpretation. Instead, the percept acquires an interacting relationship with the agency of judgment, the interpreter. This interaction does not deliver immediate contact with the interpreter, for there are intervening stages that translate what the percept presents. As he puts it, the process involves “the direct and uncontrollable interpretations of percept, antecept, and ponecept” (7.648). Notice that he does not say they are “immediate” interpretations, which would assign them status as Firsts, or instances of Firstness. These would not have the constraining force of the percept. They are *direct* interpretations. A relation of directness, I think, opens up the relation to initiating mediation. Some degree of interpretation must be entering the reaction of interpreter to interpreted.

One my purposes from the beginning was to suggest that the dynamic object or percept acts with vectorial constraints on the interpreter. I believe these are accounted for by the function of antecipuum and ponecipuum. In what follows, then, I should like to consider this hypothesis.

## The Vectorial Force of the Dynamic Object

If I am correct about Peirce's appeal to antecipuum and ponecipuum, then there is reason to make the claim that the percept, or the epistemological manifestation of the dynamic object, can nudge interpretation from the external side of semeiotic processes. Vague memories and vague anticipations are mobilized when the percept is encountered. The percept prompts the interaction and once interpretation begins, the intervening stages begin. In reaction with the constraints of the percept, the ensuing interpretation is given direction. The immediate object is in process until the process reaches the provisionally determinate pause in semeiosis. Before concluding this discussion, I shall add some brief remarks about the idea of vectorial constraints. This also is the occasion to introduce the additional point that collateral experience comes into play during the

evolution of a perceptual judgment. As Peirce says of the dynamic object, "... the Dynamical Object, which, from the nature of things, the Sign cannot express, which it can only indicate and leave the interpreter to find out by collateral experience" (8.314). And in another place, he says, "[t]he person who interprets that sentence (or any other Sign whatsoever) must be determined by the Object of it through collateral observation quite independently of the action of the Sign. Otherwise he will not be determined to thought of that object" (8.178). Collateral experience consists of awareness of past acquaintance with things associated with the object being interpreted. An explicit explanation of collateral experience may be seen in the following passage.

Two men are standing on the seashore looking out to sea. One of them says to the other, "That vessel there carries no freight at all, but only passengers." Now, if the other, himself, sees no vessel, the first information he derives from the remark has for its Object the part of the sea that he does see, and informs him that a person with sharper eyes than his, or more trained in looking for such things, can see a vessel there; and then, that vessel having been thus introduced to his acquaintance, he is prepared to receive the information about it that it carries passengers exclusively. But the sentence as a whole has, for the person supposed, no other Object than that with which it finds him already acquainted. (2.232)

It seems obvious that the injection of anticipation and memory are crucial components of collateral experience. Memory must enter to bring in the relevant bits of collateral experience, as must a sense of this relevance continuing into the future. And I suggest that the antecept and ponecept, carrying collateral experience, interact with the resistances and reactions of the percept or dynamic object, and they do so vectorially, pressing interpretations away from one or more possible directions.

In Peirce's illustration with the two men looking at the sea, a ponecept must be present in the acquaintance of the person who did not see the ship but understood where to look and what to look for. The antecept is that person's being prepared to receive information about the ship. It is important to notice that these factors are the outcomes of interaction between interpreter and percept. In this interaction, the percept constrained the interpretation in certain *ways*, in certain *respects*, and these ways or respects, I propose, work vectorially, not only because of memories and anticipations, but also because they have the force of the percept that is *directed* toward an evolving interpretation. Similar illustration may be provided by a return to the first example mentioned in this discussion.

It seems proper to say that the dot on the horizon mobilized the observers in certain respects. That is, it constrained them from its own presence but with forces acting on each observer in different ways. In addition, there must have been forces common to both observers; otherwise, they could not have converged as they continued interpreting. The first observer presumably had previous acquaintance with seeing ships at sea. The second observer had previous acquaintance, perhaps, with driftwood or even little or no experience looking at horizons of the sea. The two observers, also shared past experiences with ships, water, seaweed, logs, etc. But it is crucial to keep in mind that these antecepts and ponecepts were affected by the constraints of the percept itself, or a series of percepts, such that the provisionally final convergence of agreement could be an object or referent consented to by both rather than some other referent such as a whale.

## Some Consequences

I should like to conclude the discussion with two additional questions with suggested answers. First, what conceptual (or non-conceptual) application can this proposal about Peirce's view of constraints on interpretation have? I think there are two ways it may be helpful. The account of how dynamic objects and thus of percepts manage to act so that they are effective in interpretations extends what Peirce provides only in hints. I have tried to bring together several aspects and key ideas in Peirce's semeiotic and his theory of perception. This, I hope, shows the way Peirce's thought as a whole had fundamental interconnections. If his thought was not architectonic, which I think it was, it at least was a network.

The second consequence or application of the hypothesis I propose is its relevance for interpretation theory in general. I think that interpreters of artworks or historical evidence might be helped if they were alert to the complexity of their own enterprises with respect to the authority of both their objects and their own contributions. To take an extreme case as illustration, a historian who assumed that the interpreter does nothing but create the object of interpretation could from his perspective, legitimately write "historical" novels and submit them as accurate accounts of the past. Or a historian who assumed that the past is independently real and that the job of the historian is to blindly dig into past "facts," would not recognize the substantive role of his or her own collateral experiences in interpretation. He or she would not recognize the legitimacy or at least the positive contribution of another historian's proclaimed accurate account of the past they both had studied. The Peircean ideas of dynamic objects, percepts, immediate objects, and perceptual judgments provides a way to understand the crucial place of both sides of the interpretation — the objective and the inter-subjective.

Finally, consider an art critic engaged in interpretive criticism — which, after all, must be presupposed by historians of art, evaluative critics, and impressionist critics. Any critic must offer verbal statements, literal or figurative, about artworks. In deciding what to say about them, the critic must begin with an object, the artwork as referent. On my version of Peircean semeiotic, this referent functions initially as a dynamic object. Its interpretation is constrained by its form and what is taken as its dynamic side — its expressiveness and whatever representational significance it has — as well as collateral experience. The upshot is that both the realism of external constraints persisting from the standpoint of the artwork itself constrains criticism while the constructivism of the critic's perceptions interact with these external constraints. My point is that both sides need to be admitted into interpretive processes. Neither independent aspects of the object nor semeiotic power of the interpreter should have the final determination.

One way to emphasize my suggestions is to insist that in interpretation, humility in the face of the object is crucial. Without this humility, the nudges, the functions of percept, antecept, ponecept, and percipuum will be missed, and would reduce to the idiosyncracies of the interpreter. What I am suggesting is counterpart to the openness often attested to by creators. Creating undergoes humility and agapastic love for the object taking form in interaction with the creative agent.

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