

Recalling Where I Am: Opening Remarks for the 13th International Meeting¹

Recordando Onde Estou: Discurso de Abertura do 13^o Encontro Internacional

Vincent Colapietro

Department of Philosophy
Pennsylvania State University
vxc5@psu.edu

It is with deep gratitude and even deeper humility that I assume the responsibility of making these opening remarks. In them, I take up the simple yet impossible task of recalling where we are. Places are sites wherein histories intersect. They are indeed defined as just these intersections of just these histories. As such, actual places invite and sustain gatherings in which their defining histories are contested, celebrated, narrated and inevitably re-narrated. This makes place as much a temporal as a spatial term, as much a historical as a geographical marker. This also makes place as much a fragile function as a facilitating environment, as much the precarious possibility of a transient drama as an enduring stage of an epochal myth.

As the ecological psychologist J. J. Gibson has noted, what we perceive are not so much objects as obstacles and (to an even greater extent) *affordances*. Affordances are those aspects of our world that afford opportunities to go on, to start anew, to stop and rest, or in some other way to take up a place in the world. So, in celebrating this meeting and the history it takes up into itself and carries forward beyond anything anyone here can even imagine, I am at the same time celebrating place – concretely, this place, but also by extension this city and country. Any contemporary student informed about what deserves to be called the philosophy of the Americas rather than American philosophy (please not the plural) – any such student – would have to celebrate the role of this vast, vibrant, vital, contradictory and seductive country. Any such student would also be obliged to celebrate *this* city and indeed *this* university and *this* Center for the Study of Pragmatism – and even this very specific site (the Tucarena). So today, once again, a site of resistance to military dictatorship becomes one of welcome to hermeneutical creativity and philosophical reflection, the echoes of singers and poets from decades ago are interwoven with the voices of philosophers and other scholars to contribute to an expansive, variegated, and unfolding symphony in which we can discern patterns of unrealized possibility no less than actual accomplishments. We cannot tell the story of philosophy in the Americas or that of pragmatism without attending in detail to this vital Center and, hence, these international meetings.

Indeed, the study of Peirce and, more generally, pragmatism has benefited immensely from the effort, initiative, and imagination of Prof. Ivo Ibrí and his colleagues here. It is not in the least an exaggeration to say that there has been

1 ^{13th International Meeting on Pragmatism}, November 7th, 2011.

no more important regular gathering devoted to the intricacies and implications of pragmatism than these international congresses, that there has been no more informed, insightful, and provocative exchanges than the ones occurring in the context of these assemblages. This makes the issues of *Cognitio* in which papers from these meetings are published a public record of incomparable importance. The sound of the winged words of even our informal conversations at these meetings can, I suspect, be heard in our formal presentations and published proceedings. Such is the impact of the conversations generated at these gatherings; and such is the value of having *Cognitio* itself as a place to which we can return, as often as we desire, to recall these exchanges.

The personal generosity and graciousness of the Director of this Center translates into an institutional ambience and ethos of warmth and welcome. Beyond this, his multifaceted contribution to contemporary scholarship is itself expressed in the range and diversity of the scholars who have been participants in these gatherings.

Prof. Ivo Ibrí's work on ancient philosophy and later thought, mainly German idealism, is no less impressive than his work on Charles S. Peirce. His treatment of cosmological questions is no less subtle and compelling than his exploration of aesthetic topics. His deep sensitivity to *autopoiesis* in its myriad forms is no less deep-cutting than his rigorous engagement with the philosophy of science. For these and other reasons, one of my first acts as Chairperson of the Advisory Board of the Peirce Edition Project (PEP) was to invite him to join that Board. The scope, diversity, and depth as well as creativity, openness, and generosity of these conferences reflect the qualities of the Director of this Center. They also contribute significantly to the word of the Advisory Board of PEP.

The demands of work can stifle the spirit of playfulness, just as the humdrum exigencies of everyday life can strangle the magical qualities of human endeavor (those qualities of our experience and exertion through which work is transformed into play and, in turn, play into an exhilarating adventure of intellectual pursuits and interpersonal entanglements). But there is magic afoot here. Rather magically, the prose of painstaking attention to practical details and personal needs translates into the poetry of intellectual adventure and philosophical friendship. In turn, the poetry of such adventures and friendships inspire us, time and again, to articulate even the most rigorously formulated ideas in such arresting, exquisite, apt expressions as to elevate philosophical discourse (at least occasionally) to the level of poetic utterance. The intellectual intensity and philosophical depth made possible by these gatherings, accordingly, defines *this* place as one of unsurpassed significance, *this* Center as a site of incomparable value, and *Cognitio* as a journal of truly international prominence.

The inexhaustible wealth of the pragmatic tradition is nowhere more evident than in the capacity of the writings of Peirce, James, Dewey, and others to generate an apparently endless series of illuminating interpretations and, indeed, creative interpreters. Vital traditions require continual renewal and such renewal must take the form of inspired imagination, not just the form of a steadfast fidelity to the inaugural figures. I would be amiss to miss this occasion as an opportunity to say that there are no more insightful interpreters of creativity than Carl R. Hausman, Robert Innis, and of course the incomparable Lucia Santaella, three of the participants in this gathering.

While the human face of the Peirce community of committed inquirers is never anything more than a more or less motley association of companionable antagonists,

this face in this context shines more radiantly than it does in any other context known to me. Never is that face more alert, more welcoming, and more encouraging than it is here, at these gatherings. Moreover, the wealth of pragmatism itself is nowhere more fully on display than in these meetings. Finally, my ever deepening sense of indebtedness to Peirce's Herculean efforts to craft a viable philosophy for the indefinite future – a philosophy for the day after tomorrow – is inseparably intertwined with a deep sense of gratitude to my Brazilian colleagues. The reason is simple: Peirce's thought possesses a power, subtlety, and inherent capacity for limitless growth comparable to very few other thinkers (if any at all); but this power, subtlety, and capacity have been forcefully brought home to me by your work and the work of those from other countries whom you have brought together at these conferences. What has been true in the past will, I am certain, be true once again this year – on this occasion, in this place. So, in sum: *Obrigado*.

Endereço/ Address

Vincent Colapietro
Department of Philosophy
240 Sparks Building
Pennsylvania State University
University Park, PA 16802 - USA

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