

The lurking thing about the thing

A coisa à espreita sobre a coisa

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Abstract: A thing might be anything and nothing; it is impossible to frame any research on it. Any propositional approach seems hopelessly predestined; thinking of the thing turns the latter into an object. The object is either “real” or, “unreal” and this is obviously a trap. Who can talk on such a topic exhaustively? It is also a question of “universalia” and “particularia;” of name and naming; a nominalist and a phenomenological problem; of semiotic and representation—a boundless area. This article tries to slip out of “the cage” of propositions by tracing three philosophical doctrines that seem to reach farther than to the “solving word”. The approaches of Peirce, Husserl, and Wittgenstein tackle the abilities of relating, abstracting and comprehending how the thing is seen correctly in non-limited surrounding.

Keywords: Thing. Peirce. Husserl. Wittgenstein. Substance. Matter. Object. Relation.

Resumo: *Uma coisa pode ser qualquer coisa e nada; é impossível estruturar qualquer pesquisa sobre isso. Qualquer abordagem proposicional parece irremediavelmente predeterminada; pensar-se em uma coisa a transforma em um objeto. O objeto é “real” ou “irreal” e isto é, obviamente, uma armadilha. Quem pode discorrer exhaustivamente sobre esse tema? É também uma questão de “universalia” e “particularia”; de nome e designação; um problema nominalista e fenomenológico; de semiótica e representação – uma área sem limites. Este artigo tenta escapar da “gaiola” de proposições, identificando três doutrinas filosóficas que parecem ir além da “palavra resolutiva”. As abordagens de Peirce, Husserl e Wittgenstein lidam com as capacidades de relacionar, abstrair e compreender como a coisa é vista corretamente em um ambiente ilimitado.*

Palavras-chave: *Coisa. Peirce. Husserl. Wittgenstein. Substância. Matéria. Objeto. Relação.*

A thing is something that is a thing.
(Not Wittgenstein, but it could be him)

Introduction

British empiricism sees names as general devices for sparing the individual consideration of things. They are conveniences for understanding and talking

about things as pure figments of mind, which amounts to abstract cognition. The empiricists introduced this concept into modern philosophy with the assumption that words are signs of ideas, thus allowing abstractions to facilitate cognitive acts. Yet, Peirce calls Locke, who presented this view as “nominalist”, assuming that he regards “[...] all the ideas in our minds as simply reproductions of sensations, external and internal” (CP 8.25-26). Thus, Peirce lines up alongside the philosophers who blame Locke for his understanding of “idea” as a special kind of a “thing”, mental or material (based on his opinion that while there are material things, such as tables and chairs, there are mental things locked inside the mind). Berkeley, the first critic of Locke, was the founder of this tradition and its consequences. Whatever else Locke said, interprets according to this model—the mind regards as analogous to a box, into which ideas can be produced or escape. Contrary to such treatment is the consideration of Locke’s “idea” as a “concept”, or “percept” (LOWE, 1995, p. 19). In order to protect Locke’s use of “idea” from misinterpretation, the editors of the monumental ten-volume edition of his work have prefixed a detailed map of the full spectrum of its nuances (The Work of John Locke in ten volumes, 1823). The new research shows credibly that by “idea” Locke meant a mental entity, something like an image or a picture. He shows this best in the passage “What Idea stands for” from the beginning of his *Essay concerning human understanding*.

[...] it serves best to stand for whatsoever is the object of the understanding when a man thinks, I have used it to express whatever is meant by phantasm, notion, species, or whatever it is which the mind can be employed about in thinking [...]
(LOCKE, 1999, Book 1, Ch. I, 8).

No doubt, the listed *qualia* are mental, not material. No doubt, *phantasm*, *notion*, *etc.* are not full copies of reality but concepts. Concepts enable the mind to treat things in a bundle and make assertions about whole classes of objects instead of conceiving each object. In his introduction, A. D. Woozley says: “The time has surely come to read Locke himself and to examine the credentials of the Berkelean tradition in order to see whether they survive the scrutiny from which they have for far too long been exempted” (1964, p. 25).

1 The thing as substance/matter

It is inevitable when talking about something not to predicate it. Thus, even at this early stage of our inquiry, it is clear that we cannot talk about a “thing”; it immediately turns into a predicated object, by which we perform a minute operation—conceptualization. Therefore, instead of a thing, we have a concept. This is the way we structure the issue since Kant’s giant attempt to place the phenomena and noumena in different compartments of mind. The “object” is what “lies before”; this is its literary meaning. However, we still prefer to talk about a thing that has independent existence in contrast to qualities, which are dependent. Apparently, discussions about the “thing” concern the usages of the “object” and then turn towards questions of name, universal or real. Is this a viable approach?

These thoughts arise without even referring to the past and memory. We need to go back to the fundamentals.

We can go as far back as Aristotle and concur with him, that the first and independent thing is substance. It embraces all kinds of definitions of a thing—it is homogenous, “for itself”, a unit, something non-contextualized, an unknown. All other qualities are accidents of it. Did we say something important by this notion? Certainly “yes”—that it is incognizable. Only accidents are empirically intelligible. Nevertheless, “substance”, which is also the first of Aristotle’s categories, is actuality; anything else is in a state of potency to become accidents, or embodiments of it.

Is “substance” a thing, “THE thing”? Matter? The answer is “yes”, unless we predicate it, then we produce accident of it. Any existence, independent of cognitive activity viz. propositions, subordinates into paradigms. The nature of relations is complex. Also from Aristotle we know that the characteristics of two things derive from their contingency to a third, for example, form can be an accident or similarity of this third, but only if the two things and the third are real. Alternatively, both are real and independently existent (two totally similar things are simply not two). According to Aristotle: “Substance” has two senses, (A) ultimate substratum, which is no longer predicated of anything else, and (B) that which, being a “this”, is also separable and of this nature is the shape or form of each thing (ARISTOTLE, *Metaphysics*, V, 8).

Thus, we have roughly “a thing” in Aristotelian sense—it is substance, matter, God, a non-predicated something. However, this manifold of characters seems more a principle rather than a “thing”. If we accept substance to be “a thing”, the only thing, which has its appearances in all other things, it continues to be a principle. There is one possibility how to avoid this vicious circle suggested by Aristotle again. We may outline basic relations among all things in the universe.

All these relations, then, are numerically expressed and are determinations of number, and so in another way are the equal and the like and the same. For all refer to unity. Those things are the same whose substance is one; those are like whose quality is one; those are equal whose quantity is one; and 1 is the beginning and measure of number, so that all these relations imply number, though not in the same way” (ARISTOTLE, *Metaphysics*, Book V, 15).

The quotation shows something well known, that Aristotelian philosophy is evolutionary and it lays down fundamentals “broad, vague and rough, but very solid, unshakable” (CP 1.1) as Peirce referred to them. To overcome the broadness of the definition, we may use Aristotle. A bit earlier, in Book III of his *Metaphysics* he states: “If there is nothing apart of individuals, there will be no object of thought, but all things will be object of sense, and there will not be knowledge of anything, unless we say that sensation is knowledge.” To know things, the first step is to predicate them. As he continues: “Being and unity are the substances of things” (ARISTOTLE, *Metaphysics*, Book III, 11). This, according to him is the hardest of all and the most necessary for knowing the truth. In the *Metaphysics* the following assertions about substances are repeated: they are basic because they are ontologically independent,

other things depend on them, while they do not depend on other things. They are foundations of everything and what happens in the world is explicable in reference to them.

Matter, on the other hand, appears to be the carrier of universal substances. In addition, matter participates within any individual. A thing could be a substance and knowing it belongs to “wisdom”, or to philosophy. Yet, how does the grounding principles of knowledge transform in action?

2 The thing in semiosis

To answer this question, we have to leave Aristotle for a while and see how it appears in modern philosophy; we would like to inquire into Charles Peirce’s “semeiotic”. Peirce describes himself as “an Aristotelian of the scholastic wing, approaching Scotism, but going much further in the direction of scholastic realism” (CP 5.77 n1). One of his major achievements is his system of categories, which he describes as “post-Kantian”, “ceno-Pitagorean” and based on Aristotle’s. The last is easily observable in the earliest of his outlined version. Peirce sketched his categories remarking on phenomenology. The way we grasp objects lies in the heart of *phaneroscopy*, as he later renamed his phenomenology. In the second of his seven Harvard lectures delivered in 1903, he shaped the doctrine of pragmatism by isolating the new three categories. The latter were supposed to become the universal concepts of experience. In Peirce’s own words, “we have already seen clearly that the elements of phenomena are of three categories, quality, fact, and thought” (CP 1.423). The fundamental distinction between Peirce and Aristotle in regards to categories is this: for Aristotle, both “being” and “unity” are forms of substances. It was the same for Peirce in his early outline of categories; conceptions are mediate representations of relations between Being and Substance. Categories are conceptions: *Firstness* is immediate representation; *Secondness* and *Thirdness* are mediate ones. Here is an early draft on categories from a paper delivered to the American Academy of Arts and Sciences in 1867:

BEING,

1. Quality (Reference to a Ground)
2. Relation (Reference to a Correlate)
3. Representation (Reference to an Interpretant)

SUBSTANCE (CP 1.555).

Soon after this draft, Peirce removed Being and Substance, leaving only the basic relations as he believes the categories represent. He discerns the essence of the processes in the act of cognition. It is, first the potentiality or mere quality that turns into real by conflicting with another real (second) and, third, we have a mediator between the two, or its representation, or interpretation.

Thus, in Peirce’s sense we can talk of a thing either as a *ground* or, as a predicated thing of a proposition, which is a component of relation. There is no third way. Now we need to clear up what is the “reference to a ground”. What is a “ground”? The ground is the basic principle of all things and at the same time a

defining principle of any individual thing. The meaning of a ground reveals best as parallel to “logos”, yet not in Aristotelian but in a theological sense, as a principle of all things and of each thing. It is “thing-ness”, for example “table-ness”. The question for a ground should be: “What is the basic condition for calling a certain thing ‘table’”? These are the common features of all tables in the world, which make the appearance of each table in our consciousness conceivable as “this table”. However, ground, similarly to Logos, is both: a truth condition and a goal of action. Both are contexts for approaching “the thing”.

To recapitulate, we could know the thing in Aristotelian sense as 1) matter or substance, 2) accident, separable from matter, and 3) in reference to other substances. We may know the ground or, “thing-ness” in a Peircean sense, as it embodies in or, it *becomes* “this thing”, in other words, dynamically. In the latter case, we know “the thing” *in action*, according to the pragmatist approach. It reveals not the qualities of things, as with Aristotle, but the effects they display in action. This action is the process of sign building, which Peirce calls “semiosis”. We can illustrate Peirce’s definition by the graphic below.

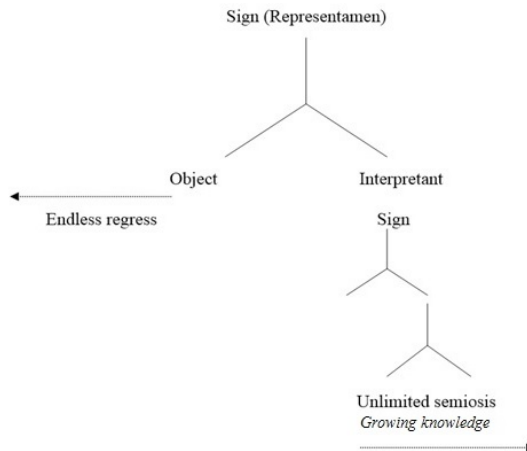


Fig.1 *Unlimited semiosis*

3 The thing objectified

However, the open question remains “Can we approach the thing as it is, not in relation to anything else, but “for itself”, for example in Kantian sense?” To do that we need to try a phenomenological tactic, outlined by its creator, Edmund Husserl. Husserl’s phenomenology asserts that abstraction without general meaning reveals itself as nonsensical. There is not any thinking process without intuitive assumption. Husserl insists on “adequate, categorially formed intuition, completely accommodated to thought, or conversely thought which draws its evidence from intuition, constitute the goal of true knowledge” (HUSSERL, 2001, p. 159). To put his view in a shorter context we need to evoke the Kantian assumption that experience

has two components: a receptive element of sensory intuition and an element of reflective conceptuality, which Kant called “spontaneity”. Yet, Kant explicitly denied that humans had the capacity to *intuit* concepts. Husserl agrees with Kant about sensory matters but holds that in higher order intuitions we do indeed have the capacity to intuit categorical entities. Husserl goes one step further claiming that human beings not only have the capacity to sense mixed categories such as colour but at the highest level we can intuitively perceive logical categories such as unity, plurality and existence.

According to a widespread understanding, pragmatism and phenomenology are different in their basics. This is surprisingly wrong; we may list their resemblances starting from the very first undertaking of both to rebuild logic as science.¹ Let us evoke phenomenology’s main concern as drawn by Husserl—it lays bare the sources from which the basic concepts and ideas of logic flow forth, to give them all the clearness and distinctness needed for understanding and for pure logic. There is much more intuition in his writings than the student of pragmatism or of Kant can withstand. However, Husserl does not take up Kantianism as his goal of investigation, but Leibnitz. He wants to see logic as a *mathesis universalis* in the manner of Leibniz. Broadly, Husserl endeavours to distinguish between the meaning of an expression and its power to name or to direct itself to something objective. For example, the “Victor of Jena”, “vanquished at Waterloo” can refer to the same object—Napoleon. This shows that the names can have different meanings but the same objective references. A thing indicates properly if it serves to show something to some thinking being. These conclusions originate from his understanding that “sign” and “expression” are often confused as synonyms. Husserl accepts that every sign is a sign of something, whilst not every sign has a meaning, which it expresses. Perhaps this thought comes from Frege’s distinction of “Sinn” (sense) and “Bedeutung” (meaning). Yet, Husserl also claims that in many cases it is not even true that a sign “stands for” that of which we may say it is a sign. For him only meaningful signs are expressions by fulfilling the signification conditions. “Such ‘expressions’ in short, have properly speaking, no *meaning*” (HUSSERL, 2001, p. 105). This view is arguable if “meaningful” is the final cause of a *conscious* act of response. Nevertheless, there are responses, caused by non-intelligent stimuli, which are not only in organisms but also among plants and even minerals. Their responses are *lawful*, since they belong to quasi-organized forms of existing. Meaning as such is not a proper attribute but those responses behave in accordance with certain rules. As symmetrical responses, they are “rule-like”. Thus, we can hardly call them “insignificant” just because they were caused by non-meaningful stimuli.

1 A whole issue of the “European Journal of Pragmatism and American Philosophy” was dedicated to *Wittgenstein and Pragmatism*, as it was the title of the symposia on the topic: EJPAM, Issue 2, v. 4, 2012. The relation between the object and the thing is a focus of another collection of work, tackled from similar perspective in: FABER, R. and GOFFEY, A. (eds.), *The Allure of Things: Process and Object in Contemporary Philosophy*, Bloomsbury, 2014. More books published recently deal with the same issue, for example: BONCOMPAGNI, A. *Wittgenstein and Pragmatism. On Certainty in the Light of Peirce and James*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016.

It is clearly impossible to summarise the Husserl's colossal work, even on the narrower issue of presenting the thing. What is agreeable is a parallel to, for example, the equally immense labour of Peirce on his sign-system; we can recall that he promised to his friend Victoria Lady Welby to outline "59049 classes of sign" (CP 8.343). Both systems are in the Aristotelian-Kantian current of object classification for a similar reason—to deny it. Peirce's signification rely on the sign-net thrown onto a manifold of objects in order to reduce it to categorical unities, while Husserl's distinctions show a scrupulous advancement to the object's core by removing the ambiguities within which the presented phenomena grow over. We cannot know an object unless we know the sum of the effects it displays in action, Peirce would say. We cannot have an object before our eyes unless we remove all the misleading appearances of content aroused between our intentional image of it and its presentation, Husserl would claim somewhat closely united with Aristotle.

The thing must be "real" in order to define the truth about itself. Real should not depend on representation or, as Aristotle implied, it must be something general in all things. Peirce calls this general the object's "character" that is presentable in all individuals. However, he is sceptical about finding such general character. Yet, to define in what way something is true is another tough question. For Peirce, as a logician, the truth of anything attaches to the right thinking of it. He is mostly convinced that "[...] there is such a thing as Truth which is independent of what you or I or any group or generation of men may opine upon the subject" (CP 2.153). However, it is not thinking alone that matters, imagining plays a role too. Imagining draws memory into the cognition act. We scratch our thoughts from the past (memory, experience). The metaphor with which Peirce illustrates the role of memory asserts: "Accordingly, just as we say that a body is in motion, and not that motion is in a body we ought to say that we are in thought and not that thoughts are in us" (CP 5.289 Fn. P1). Memory evokes this pre-thought. There we meet images and thoughts, which flow with different degrees of vividness.

In retracing our way from conclusions to premises, or from determined cognitions to those which determine them, we finally reach, [...] a point beyond which the consciousness in the determined cognition is more lively than in the cognition which determines it (CP 5.263).

The similarities between both systems are obvious and allow a conclusion that for both, knowing a thing represents a process of approximation it. In the act of cognition, according to Peirce, we have triads of sensation, perception and reflection. Those triads are instantaneous, they flash at the moment we approach the object. However, this flash is analytic rather than synthetic. Within an instant, there is a process of approximating the essence of the thing, and we know it "for us". If we want to know it "as it is", and for itself, we must retrace the process back to the matter/essence of it. We know the thing in an axis of increased knowledge by interpretation on one side, and by stripping off its contextual meanings, on the other. The substantial difference from Husserl's phenomenology is that for Husserl we remove the quasi-images of the thing, along with the process of retracing back our intuition about it, thus we embody truth in it. With all the complicated details in

both systems, we may conclude that the slipping thing about the thing would always be the thing as it is; in other words, its “thing-ness”. We may intuit it or raise our knowledge of it by gathering *all* the effects it displays, but what is *all*?

4 The thing as frozen meaning

Still, it is curious to question whether there is an alternative philosophical tradition, which sees the thing not as an object of approximation but as it is, statically. We may thus easily approach Plato. We will not consider this line in details because there are convincing examples of understanding the thing in the heart of Plato’s thought and through his dialogues. Moreover, we can find the best illustrations in his most read and quoted one, in *Cratylus*. However, even the strictest teachers advise the students to skip reading its etymological part, since they find it boring and out of date. Surprisingly, we can find something covertly there—an explanation of how the name gains its meaning. As is well known, Plato is always double-minded in his hypotheses. At first, he sees naming as a natural process and the one who gives names as a skilled inventor. Then he diverts to another thesis to the effect that names exist according to an agreement, or convention: “We often add letters or take them out and change the accents as well, thus swerving aside from what we want to name.”(PLATO, 1997, p. 118). At a certain point, Socrates summarizes his view adding an unexpected and illuminative conclusion.

Soc. Now, I think our name for human beings is a case of just this sort. It was a phrase but became a name. One letter—“a”—has been taken away and the accent on the final syllable has become a grave. The name “human” signifies that the other animals do not investigate or reason about anything they see, nor do they observe anything closely. But a human being no sooner sees something—that is to say, *opōpe*—then he observes it closely and reason about it. Hence human beings alone among the animals are correctly named *anthropos*—one who observes closely what he has seen (*anathrōn ha opōpe*). (PLATO, 1997, p.118).

With the passage of time, some words connect to others and lose their endings or prefixes. In a contraction of meaningful fractions of the sentence, a new name appears. These are the most common cases of etymology, where parts of the sentences blend and form a new word. Most often, those sentences were imperative, representing commands or exclamations but are also explanations or differentiations, clarifications or quality contrasts. The example with the meaning of *Anthropos* shows all these processes together: it was originally a sentence, which described how among all animals it was able to investigate the surrounding world by using his eyes, and to investigate by seeing. By exploring more cases, it becomes clear that the process is universally valid. So, what is a thing on this semantic level? A bundle of many things that originally represented sentences, mostly orders for action or, simple descriptions. After a while, the elements connect to each other, merge and blend by which they lose some parts and then freeze. The new unit starts to indicate different meaning. In other words, theorizing on a thing resembles the creation of

a thing. Let us recall Peirce's view. Knowing a thing, for him, means *re*-cognizing it each time we approach it in a triadic act of: 1) a comparison with numberless other cases; 2) a verification with the same object as we saw it for the first time in our life; and 3) a conclusion, confirming that it is *this* thing, which is before our eyes. The process of comparison goes on lightning-fast. Again, it is analytical, not synthetically performed cognition act.

5 The thing portrayed

Yet, do we always think of the surrounding world as something never achieved? No, we do not! The greatest advocate of the latter view after Kant is Wittgenstein. The famous opening words of *Tractatus* are: "The world is everything that is the case" (TLP 1). "The world is the totality of facts, not of things." (TLP 1.1) However, he is seeing the fact as a unit, but as something composed by more than one fact, as a manifold of "atomic facts". Is the atomic fact an ultimate something? Not at all: "an atomic fact is a combination of objects (entities, things)" (TLP 2.0.1). It is worth trying to construct Wittgenstein's doctrine on the reviewed topic. We can do that by showing one of his most fundamental views—about the impossibility of *a priori* knowledge.

5.6331 For the field of sight has not a form like this:



5.634 This is connected with the fact that no part of our experience is also *a priori*.

He drew the ellipsoidal shape which our eye has and from the obvious fact that "the field of sight has not a form like this" (TLP 5.6331), he asked, why do we not see the world this way? The fact confirms that no part of what we see is *a priori* given; the intellect fulfils the work of the eye. The several conclusions that followed are that "Everything we see could also be otherwise; everything we describe—too and therefore: "There is no order of things *a priori*" (TLP 5.634). We are giving this particular example because it is almost the same in Peirce's philosophy: "The space we immediately see [...] is not [...] a continuous oval, but is a ring, the filling up of which must be the work of the intellect" (CP 5.220). Wittgenstein's philosophy is representational; the logical propositions present the facts as they are by showing the logical form of reality or in his words, by *exhibiting* it. The propositions of logic are tautologies. Therefore, they say nothing. This leads him to a surprising generalization, "The world and life are one" (TLP 5.621). Thus, Being and Substance are equal. A fact may be "atomic", but in reality, there are conglomerates of facts to be observed, in other words, they are always in "a state of affairs". State of affairs is the mode in which the facts are presented, according to what they show.

The world consists in facts, not in things, since “what is the case” is always factual configurations of things in the state of affairs.

In short, after the claim that the object contains the possibility of all states of affairs, and that the possibility of an object’s occurrence in atomic facts is the form of the object, it follows that objects form the substance of the world and that is why they cannot be compound. Objects are “pseudo-concept” (TLP 4.1272). The object is simple but a concept is already given in it and it falls under this concept. The vicious circle breaks by adding the notes of “introduction and presentation” to “defining”. Defining can neither be introducing, nor presenting a formal object as a primitive idea. For we need an expression for the general term of the formal series of objects.

We have *things* (objects) said to be the possibility of all states of affairs taking part in a proposition. The proposition is an order of facts. “The proposition constructs the world with the help of logical scaffolding, and therefore one can see in the proposition all the logical features possessed by reality *if it is true*” (TLP 4.023). Now, a true picture of reality must have syntax, a lawful order of presentation. The presentation shows formal concepts (facts) as they are in a certain order. If this order is of pictorial art, what assures the understanding of the logical symbolism that is necessary for understanding? Only one answer can provide solution—the relation. Relation consists of both, presentation and “formal concept”; it secures universal and particular meaning of the picture. The thing in the proposition is the carrier of the concept for a picture of reality. Yet, the concept within the syntax of the proposition includes logical meaning, viz. understanding. The formal concept (fact), lawfully ordered in a proposition exhibits logical sense. Accordingly, “showing,” means representing. Let us recall the meaning of *Anthropos*—investigating by seeing. A logical picture (thought) that is combined with another, represents a concept, creates a (mini) discourse. Let us remember that Wittgenstein wanted to pass silently by things whereof he cannot speak. However, the process resembles seeing with our imperfect eye—the intellect fulfils the work of the represented “picture of reality”. We can add this remark relying on several notes Wittgenstein made on reality, which cannot be *a priori* true (TLP 2.225). Along this line, he claims that thought is the logical picture of the facts, but most interesting is his statement that an atomic fact is thinkable because we can imagine it. Therefore, “The totality of true thoughts is the picture of the world” (TLP 3.01).

Objects (or, *simples*), according to Wittgenstein are “objects of acquaintance, not sense-data but their unanalysable constituents” (GLOCK, 1996, p. 270). Perhaps the nucleus of the later development of Wittgenstein’s thought lies in his understanding of the act of presentation. It becomes more flexible in his later work, allowing that the role of signification as a whole differs from the one of an atomic fact: “One name stands for one thing, and another for another thing, and they are connected together. And so the whole, like a living picture, presents the atomic fact” (TLP 4.0311). This seems like a perfect definition of Peirce’s *semiosis*, but a few sentences later, Wittgenstein assuredly stresses his view: “My fundamental thought is that the ‘logical constants’ do not represent. That the *logic* of the facts cannot be represented” (TLP 4.0312). What is implied by the allowance that “the referents of the world-picture do not necessary ‘pin’ propositions onto reality?” (GLOCK, 1996, p. 270-271). Is it a roundabout way of confirming his view that what can be shown cannot be said? He strongly relies on the ongoing dispute between Russell

and Bradley, where Russell argues that the fact of our language having different types of words for things (objects), properties and relations *shows* that relations are as real as objects and properties (MONK, 2005, p. 38). The initial words of the *Tractatus* urge to thinking of the world not as made up of “things” but as made up of *facts*. According to Monk, “the crucial difference is that things are simple, but a fact is *articulate* [...] it has *parts*” (MONK, 2005, p. 38). Wittgenstein calls these parts *objects*. It follows that we can know nothing about objects unless they form a fact. Facts, in their turn, correspond to true propositions, and that is how Wittgenstein reaches the conclusion, “The world is the totality of facts”.

Our point about the thing is that it is analysable as an object only i.e. as related to something else. This view combines all systems outlined but they rely on Peirce’s thought that we cannot have a conception of the absolutely incognizable. Let us return to the beginning of this article and remember the literary sense of “object”—“something that lies before”. What is this—a contracted sentence? Even the strictest among the discussed philosophers, Wittgenstein, would not claim that the atomic sense of an object—the “thing-ness” is achievable. It is a slipping reality, lurking before the eyes as embedded in the syntax of the picture of the world.

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