

## Peirce as reader & reading as reverie

*Peirce como leitor & leitura como devaneio*

**Vincent Colapietro**

University of Rhode Island – USA  
colapietrovm@gmail.com

**Abstract:** Scientific inquirers in the modern sense, those thinkers with whom C. S. Peirce most deeply identified, “have been successful because they have spent their lives not in their libraries and museums but in their laboratories and in the field” (CP 1.34). But, in fact, Peirce spent countless hours engaged in an activity he appears to slight in this and other passages. Indeed, he seems to have misread his life as a reader. The author offers a portrait of Peirce as a reader, but of even greater importance he draws upon Georges Poulet to sketch a phenomenology of reading and upon Elaine Scarry to offer an account of reading as a form of reverie. In addition, he shows how Peirce’s thought underwrites both of these endeavors, paying close attention to Peirce’s synechistic account of mind, consciousness, and subjectivity, but also consideration to the semeiotic categories of diagram, symbol, and to a less degree icons.

**Keywords:** Concrete reasonableness. Consciousness. Continuity. Diagrammatic signs. The “I” (or *ego*). Identity. Imagination. Mind. Phenomenology. Poulet. Reading. Scarry. Subjectivity. Symbols.

**Resumo:** *Investigadores científicos no sentido moderno, aqueles pensadores com os quais C.S. Peirce identificava-se mais profundamente, “têm sido bem-sucedidos pois eles passaram suas vidas não em suas bibliotecas ou museus, mas em seus laboratórios e no campo” (CP 1.34). De fato, Peirce gastou incontáveis horas envolvido em uma atividade na qual ele parece menosprezar nesta e em outras passagens. Aliás, ele parece ter interpretado incorretamente sua vida como leitor. O autor oferece um retrato de Peirce como leitor, mesmo quando de maior importância ele se vale de Georges Poulet para delinear uma fenomenologia de leitura e sobre Elaine Scarry para oferecer um relato de leitura como uma forma de devaneio. Além, disso, ele mostra como o pensamento de Peirce garante ambos esforços, acompanhando de perto a consideração peirciana sinequista da mente, consciência e subjetividade, mas também, a consideração às categorias semióticas de diagrama, símbolo e para ícones de graus menores.*

**Palavras-chave:** *Razoabilidade concreta. Consciência. Continuidade. Signos diagramáticos. O “eu” (ou ego). Identidade. Imaginação. Mente. Fenomenologia. Poulet. Leitura. Scarry. Subjetividade. Símbolos.*

## 1 Introduction

C. S. Peirce possessed the expansive soul of a humanist scholar<sup>1</sup> and the defining passion of an experimental scientist. Nothing human was alien to him and virtually everything knowable seemed to be of interest. There is no contradiction or necessarily any tension between these two facets of his intellectual persona. The experimentalist side however tends to eclipse, even in Peirce's own self-understanding (perhaps especially here), the other side. His devotion to learning and love of books were however as deep as his passion for inquiry, his intense desire to find things out being truly his consuming passion (CP 1.8; CP 1.14).

We often overlook the obvious, not because it is unimportant but simply because it is obvious.<sup>2</sup> Peirce arguably did so with respect to reading, *first*, in his own case and, *second*, in the case of this activity being integral to inquiry as his own life exemplified his devotion to discovery. Accordingly, *it is instructive to portray Peirce as a reader and to investigate*, using some of the resources provided by his writings, *the activity of reading*. As he would have done were he alive today, however, theorists who have taken up the topic of reading are members of the community of inquirers whose works he would have taken into account (see, e.g., CP 6.9).<sup>3</sup> Writing about Peirce is most Peircean when it situates him in an *ongoing* investigation, the later stages of which he would have appreciated but could not have known. He is our contemporary in part because we can make our contemporaries his co-inquirers and interlocutors. When we do so, the power, fecundity, and relevance of his thought becomes more manifest than otherwise.

- 
- 1 Peirce tended to have a harshly negative view of Renaissance humanism. This tendency contributes to his failure to see himself as a humanist scholar. Also, he was appreciative of how ambiguous the word was ("when you talk of Humanism, I am utterly perplexed to know what it means" [CP 5.37]). When disambiguated, however, he identified with the stance of humanists, carefully circumscribed: "I, for one, heartily admit that a Humanism, that does not pretend to be a science but only an instinct, like a bird's power of flight, but purified by meditation, is the most precious contribution that has been made to philosophy for ages" (CP 5.496).
  - 2 "Young America will call," Peirce observes, "familiar [or commonplace] phenomena [so many] squeezed lemons, whatever they had to teach already learned, things to be left behind in pressing on to new things" (CP 6.564). In this it would be deeply mistaken. There is much to be learned from painstaking attention to the most familiar phenomena, including the most commonplace activities, such as reading.
  - 3 If we are to proceed architectonically, we must proceed historically. "What I recommend," Peirce writes, "is that every person who wishes to form an opinion concerning fundamental problems should first of all make *a complete survey of human knowledge*, [and, thus,] should take note of all the valuable ideas in each branch of science" (CP 6.9; emphasis added). In order to do so, one must of course read the works of one's predecessors. This is only one of the more obvious ways in which reading is integral to inquiry.

## 2 Peirce as reader<sup>4</sup>

René Descartes is alleged to have said, when asked about why there were so few books in his residence, the world is my book.<sup>5</sup> That is, there is no need for second-hand accounts when we can frame our theories on first-hand experience.<sup>6</sup> Rather than read treatises on anatomy, Descartes spent time in butcher-shops and made careful observations of the internal organs of various animals. C. S. Peirce, one of the most anti-Cartesian of philosophers (see, e.g., SANTAELLA, 1999), appears no less committed to such a stance. He seems to share at least this much with the figure from whom he so dramatically distanced himself.<sup>7</sup> After all, he asserted:

[...] modern students of science have been successful because they have spent their lives *not* in their libraries and museums but in their laboratories and in the field; and while in the laboratories and in the field they have been not gazing on nature with a vacant eye [...] but have been *observing*—that is, perceiving by aid of analysis—and testing [the] suggestions [or implications] of [their] theories” (CP 1.34; emphasis added in instance of *not*).<sup>8</sup>

- 
- 4 As it turns out, this essay is a companion piece to one written several months before. This was not at first my conscious intention, but I did realize it in the course of drafting the later text. The earlier one, “Peirce as Writer,” is forthcoming in *Philosophy and Literature*.
- 5 The concluding sentences of Part I of his *Discourse* indicate as much, though he turns from the book of the world to “making himself an object of study” (87).
- 6 Peirce suggests, “each step in science has been a lesson in logic.” This is illustrated by one of the sciences in which he was formally trained. It was so when Lavoisier and his contemporaries took up the study of chemistry. The old chemist’s adage had been, ‘*Lege, lege, labora, ora, et relege.*’ Lavoisier’s method was not to read and pray but to dream that some long and complicated chemical process would have a certain effect, to put it [this dream or hypothesis] into practice with dull patience.” That is, his method “was to carry his mind into his laboratory, to make of his alembics and cucurbits instruments of thought, giving a new conception of reasoning a something to be done with one’s eyes open, in manipulating real things instead of words and fancies” (CP 5.363; also, in EP 1:111; see also CP 5.420; KENNY, 1968). As it turns out, however, manipulating fancies and words is hardly as irrelevant to the work of inquiry as this passage makes them appear to be (see, e.g., W 6:71).
- 7 Of course, Peirce was hardly unique in his opposition to Descartes. “Most contemporary philosophers have been,” Richard J. Bernstein notes, “in revolt against the Cartesian framework. Descartes is frequently called the father of modern philosophy. If we are to judge by philosophy during the past hundred years, this title can best be understood in a Freudian sense. It is a common characteristic of many contemporary philosophers that they have sought to overthrow and dethrone the father” (1971, p. 5).
- 8 The resolve to put one’s theories to the test of experience (what he calls in the text being cited *verification*) distinguishes truly scientific inquirers from other theorists. Insofar as the elaboration and defense of a theory does not involve, at critical junctures, the work of testing what one is articulating and advocating, one is not animated by the spirit of science in Peirce’s sense.

In Peirce's own case, however, there is in this all too sharp distinction a misleading hyperbole.<sup>9</sup> Indeed, Peirce appears to have *misread* his own life, for *as a scientist* that life was devoted to reading. It would indeed be hard to find a philosopher, let alone a scientist, in the second half of the nineteenth century and opening decades of the twentieth who had read more widely or deeply than Peirce (see, e.g., CP 1.4-6). The fact is that he spent countless hours engaged in the exacting task of reading the most challenging texts, from Galen's scientific treatises to Scotus's "dusty folios," from Plato's dramatic dialogues to Schiller's "aesthetic letters," from Kant's *Critique* (or, as he insisted upon spelling it, *Critick*) to *Hegel's* Logic, from Bain's psychology to Spencer's cosmology, also from the most ancient to the most recent contributions to science (see, e.g., Peirce in WIENER [ed.], p. 227-274). Of course, Peirce *did* spend time in the field and laboratories, though in the end far less in laboratories making observations than in his private study reading texts, ancient, medieval, and modern. He was able to gaze on nature with such a discerning eye *because* he had been so thoroughly absorbed in reading texts with a questing spirit. Reading was for him what Descartes claimed it could be at his best: a transformative conversation with exalted minds (84). As a reader, Peirce strove in the first instance to attain (to use his own apt expression) "an interior understanding of opposing systems" (CN 1: 33). He did so primarily for the sake of his lifelong investigation into the most effective forms of experimental investigation (his quest of quests).

There is an irony here. "A philosophy or method of thinking which is held in control—the mind rising above it, and understanding its limitations—is," Peirce stresses, "a valuable instrument; but a method in which one is simply immersed, without seeing how things can be otherwise rationally regarded, is a sheer restriction of the mental powers" (CN 1: 33). But what he says of an epoch is almost always also true of most of the individuals in that epoch. In the Middle Ages, for example, logicians paid exclusive attention to syllogistic reasoning, but in the actual debates of the medieval schoolmen, including these logicians, dilemmatic reasoning was "the most characteristic form of demonstrative reasoning." Even so, it was "left unnoticed in their logical treatises" (CP 3.404). This is not peculiar to this period: "The best of such works [logical treatises], at all epochs, though they reflect in some measure contemporary modes of thought, have always been considerably behind the times. For the methods of thinking that are living activities in men are not [or tend not to be] objects of reflective consciousness. They baffle the student because they are part of himself." "'Of thine eye I am eyebeam,' says Emerson."<sup>10</sup> "The methods of thinking men consciously admire are different from, and often, in some respects, inferior to those they actually employ" (CP 3.404).

With respect to reading, as integral to his mode of inquiry, this is as true of Peirce as it is of the medieval logicians who so strikingly overlooked dilemmatic argumentation. In some measure, we cannot avoid misreading our own methods. This is indeed the point of the line from Emerson's poem "The Sphinx" quoted, once again, by Peirce: in most instances, the eye does not see either its own seeing

9 It is likely that this is also misleading in the case of Descartes. He was better read than such a response about the paucity of books in his residence seems to imply.

10 Peirce was fond of quoting this line of poetry. It is worth recalling here that, in his judgment, "nothing is truer than true poetry" (EP 2:193).

or its habits of seeing. So, when I claim that Peirce misread his own life, I am using one of his own insights to help explain one of his oversights. His theoretical self-understanding assists us in appreciating his methodological self-misunderstanding: Our actual methods of thinking tend to be in advance of our methodological self-understanding. Our *logic utens* runs ahead of our *logica docens*. As an inquirer, Peirce was an indefatigable, painstaking, deeply sympathetic, and ultimately critical (fiercely critical) reader. He went into the laboratory or the field with ears and nose, nose and fingers, attuned to the inherent intricacies and intricate connections characteristic of even the seemingly most ordinary and simple phenomena. The most commonplace phenomena are, in our unreflective experience, “overlaid and saturated with the products of the reflection of past generations and by-gone ages” (ibid.). We however are not invincibly distanced from these phenomena by the extent to which they are always already interpreted, classified, and simply named. Somewhat paradoxically, his reading *attuned* Peirce to see with what John Dewey calls “cultivated naïveté” (the paradox being that learning can help us becoming naïve). We cannot recover our “primitive naïveté.” “But there is attainable,” Dewey claims, “*a cultivated naïveté* of ear, eye, and thought, one that can be acquired only through the discipline of severe thought” (LW 1: 40; *emphasis added*).

In the case of Peirce, as in most other cases, the acquisition of such discipline, the cultivation of such *naïveté*, involved a lifelong engagement in variable forms of reading. In one place, he identified three genres of reading. Of course, Peirce was hardly oblivious to his reliance on reading. It is thematized more than a few times: it is made, if only in several paragraphs here and there, the explicit and focal object of his concern. My only claim is that he does not accord reading as prominent a place in his theory as the activity had in his life (his life precisely as an inquirer). There is much evidence that Peirce read novels and plays and indeed other *literary* texts for “entertainment” (though it is likely the word “entertainment” is not quite right here). But most of his reading was directly related to one or another of his investigations. In an important text, the author Peirce addresses his “Reader” as a Reader and even presumes to give advice: “I hope and trust, Reader, you will not take my word for this” but undertake the proof yourself (CP 4.597).

What prompts him to do so is a lifelong experience of careful reading of numerous countless books and essays. “If fifty years spent chiefly with books makes my counsel about reading of any value, I would submit for your approbation the following [three] maxims.” (The genre of writing to which Peirce was most committed was that in which he submitted his claims and arguments for the approbation of his readers. Such a genre however demanded that his readers be co-reasoners: he could not spare them the hard work of thinking through the problem or following the steps in an argument, only do something to aid them in the execution of this work.) The *first maxim* is: “There are more books that are really worth reading than you will ever be able to read. Confine yourself, therefore, to books worth reading and re-reading; and as far as you can, own the good books that are valuable to you” (CP 4.597). Peirce followed his own advice: he amassed a very impressive personal library. He sold it to John Hopkins University, taking the money but keeping the books for as long as he could (FISCH, 1986; BRENT, 1998)! Though he does not say this, I take it to be implicit in what he does say: any book worth reading is worth re-reading. In any event, we must accept our finitude, in particular, the limitations

on our time and energy, devoting ourselves only to books really worth reading and thus re-reading.

The *second maxim* is: “Always read every book critically.” The manner of critical engagement however will vary from the value we are trying to derive from our experience of reading. “A book may have,” Peirce notes, “three kinds of value.” Hence, they merit three different modes of critique. First, a book “may enrich your ideas with mere possibilities, the mere ideas, that it suggests.” (To begin with the entertainment of possibilities should alert the adept *reader* of Peircean texts that the threefold classification being unfolded here is done so in strict accord with his three categories. And such a reader would be right in making this conjecture.) Second, a book “may inform you of facts.” Third, “it may submit, for your approbation, lines of thought and evidences of the reasonable connection of possibilities and facts.” How we read depends, in no small measure, on what we read, also on what our purpose in reading happens to be (to expand our sense of the range of possibilities is one thing, to add to our knowledge of facts is another, and to reason in the sense intended by Peirce is yet a third thing.) So, as readers, Peirce advises us: “Consider carefully the attractiveness of ideas, the credibility of the assertions, and the strengths of the arguments, and set down your well-matured objections in the margins of your own books” (CP 4.597). To read critically is to read actively and, in turn, to read actively is to read assertively (to talk back to the author). The traces of the dialogue between ourselves and a text, especially our objections, misgivings, and doubts, should be evident in our marginalia.

The *third maxim* concerns as much being a reader of the world as a reader of books and, indeed, the intimate relationship between the two activities. In this maxim, Peirce advises his readers to “procure, in lots of twenty thousand or more, slips of stiff paper of the size of postcards, made up in pads of fifty or so.” He instructs them moreover: “Have a pad always about you, and note upon one of them anything worthy of note, the subject being stated at the top and reference being made below to available books or to your own note books.” Please note: Peirce is not advising us solely or even mainly about a noteworthy passage in a given text. Rather he is encouraging us to take up in our everyday lives the task of the painstaking observer. If something is noteworthy, it is, he suggests, worthy of being not only noticed (or observed) but also *noted* (written down on a *note* card). The community of inquirers is and must be a community of observers and, consequently, we should compare our observations with those of others (hence, Peirce advises us not only *to note* what we observe but also to cross-reference this to the observations made by others). Just as the eyes and other senses animate the pen or pencil,<sup>11</sup> so the implement of writing might be an aid to observation, not only an aid to thought (Viola). That is, such an implement might help to focus and discipline then senses. The vital matter is to cultivate an active mind and, in addition, to keep a detailed record of that mind’s daily musings, acts of attending, and inferences. “If your mind is active, a day will seldom pass,” Peirce predicts, “when you do not find a dozen items worth such recording [or *noting*]; and at the end of twenty years, the slips having been classified and arranged and rearranged, from time to time, you

---

11 For a fallibilist at least, a pencil is arguably preferable to a pen. Only the hand that erases can write the truth, insofar as it can be written.

will find yourself in possession of an encyclopaedia adapted to your special wants.” The sagacity of Peirce’s advice is nowhere more evident than how he sums up this maxim: It is especially the small points that are thus to be noted; for the large ideas you will carry in your head” (CP 4.596) and, accordingly, there is little reason to take great pains in jotting down these “large ideas.”

The task of bearing witness to our observations, painstaking, detailed, daily and even hourly witness to them, is one to be deliberately cultivated and personally cherished. The record of our observations of the world is, at the same time, a record of our lives: the *outreaching* identity of the semeiotic self is a worldly affair, indeed, a love affair with the observable world. It is a map of the world from our angle of vision. It is no less an autobiography narrated from the contingent loci of an attentive observer.<sup>12</sup>

For Peirce, phenomenology (or phaneroscopy) is *first philosophy*. It is the inaugural branch of philosophical (or coenosopic) inquiry. It however identifies a task never to be superseded. It is one to which we are required to return, at every stage and in every context of inquiry. These points concern not only the strict ordering of the branches of philosophical investigation but also the self-discipline of any philosopher who merits the title by virtue of openness to the world, as it discloses itself in everyday experience. Taking note in the twofold sense already indicated—noticing and then recording what one has observed—is an instance of an endeavor to read the world, though one in which the pressure of making sense of phenomena is deliberately subordinated to the more delicate, difficult task of simply seeing what stares us in the face. The time for proffering explanations should wait upon that of making as careful observations of commonplace phenomena as we can. The drive to explain should never usurp the drive to perceive.

Peirce’s phenomenology was not only a formal philosophical discipline but also a daily self-discipline. His reading of Hegel and other authors informed, animated, and oriented his efforts to bear painstaking witness to the experiential world. In turn, his reading of the world and, at a more rudimentary level, his disciplined attention to the most seemingly inconsequential phenomena (attention akin to that animating lyrical poet and the visual artist) informed his reading of those authors. He entered the laboratory or field as an inquirer who had read an extremely large number of books (he was a Herculean inquirer and this is nowhere more manifest than in his vast reading). He read some of these books for their suggestions regarding possibilities, others for their claims about facts, and still others for their elaboration of arguments. He entered his study or the library as an inquirer who had been out in the world, making observations about all manner of things and occurrences. Readers of Peirce would be blind to one of the most distinctive features of this singular genius if they did not recognize how intimately related are his reading of the world and his reading of books.

Even so, Peirce was a bibliophile whose account of inquiry often does not afford a place for his manifest love of the written word. Someone might argue that

---

12 In *On Beauty and Being Just*, Elaine Scarry stresses the value of being willing “continually to revise one’s own location in order to place oneself in the path of beauty” (1999, p. 7). What reading affords inquirers and others is the opportunity of revise our location and, hence, our angle of vision. This is a point to which I will return.

his love of books was incidental to his love of truth, the animating passion of his intellectual life. I would respond to this by claiming that they are of a piece: Peirce was able to read phenomena so well in part because he read books so intensely. The dream Reader, the airy nothing given perceptible presence in Peirce's actual writings (I am disposed to go so far and say *palpable* presence), invites not so much an ironic as simply a playful reversal. If such a Reader is given by the philosopher's pen a designation and, hence, an opportunity to inhabit our consciousness, so this philosopher himself might be seen as a being who takes determinate shape in one of the most peculiar forms of human reverie—reading. The printed words, in their apparent immobility, *ensoul* the reader's personal consciousness (EP 2:474): they become truly an *animating* presence, enlivening, directing, prompting, constraining but also emancipating that consciousness. They become alive in us and we become enlivened by them. Peirce, as the author of any texts of his we might be reading, is decidedly not a figure in an ungrounded reverie. He is rather a figure in a reverie grounded in an intricate network of enabling constraints. These constraints enable fluency of thought far more than they inhibit it. To appreciate this, however, requires us to probe just what reading is.

Nothing in Peirce's self-identifications<sup>13</sup> stand in tension to my emphasis on him as a reader. *As a scientist*, Peirce was to an exemplary degree a scholar. He took pains to take into account the research of his predecessors and contemporaries. We would be wise to follow his example. On this occasion, I will however be highly selective, focusing only on two of our contemporaries, Elaine Scarry (b. 1946) and Georges Poulet (1902-1991) and none of our predecessors. The Belgian literary theorist Poulet has written a brilliant essay entitled "Phenomenology of Reading,"<sup>14</sup> while the North-American philosopher Scarry has written a no less brilliant book on the topic of reading (*Dreaming by the Book*).<sup>15</sup> (She is also the author of *The Body in Pain* and *On Beauty and Being Just*.) From a strictly Peircean perspective, the *phenomena* of reading not only invite but demand us to institute just what Poulet sketches in his essay, a phenomenology of this process. The phenomena in question are primarily processes and practices. Hence, they also demand an explication in

---

13 What Lionel Trilling claims regarding Sigmund Freud might with even greater justice be claimed regarding Peirce: while he was conversant with what we call the humanities, "he is, above all else, a scientist. He was reared in the ethos of the nineteenth-century physical sciences, which was as rigorous and as jealous as a professional ethos can possibly be, and he found in that ethos the heroism, which he always looked for in men, in groups, and in himself" (1955, p. 14-15).

14 POULET, 1969, p. 53-68.

15 *Dreaming by the Book* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999). "On vivacity: the difference between daydreaming and imagining-under-authorial instruction" in *Representations*, volume 52 (Fall 1995), 1-26. Scarry is also the author of *Bodies in pain: the making and unmaking of the World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985) and *On beauty and being just* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999). Some philosophers or theorists are as important for hitting upon extremely important but surprisingly neglected topics as for their treatment of such topics. Elaine Scarry is unquestionably one such philosopher.



terms drawn from (at least)<sup>16</sup> the theory of signs. As suggestive and insightful as Scarry's exploration is, I will not spend much time on the details of her analysis, concentrating rather on her thesis (reading is a form of dreaming, albeit a very distinctive or singular form, since dreaming in this case is under the influence of authorial instruction). My hope is that reading Peirce in light of Poulet and Scarry illuminates his work in suggestive and fruitful ways.

### 3 Notes for a phenomenology of reading: adding Peirce to Poulet

In 1892, Charles S. Peirce wrote in "The Law of Mind": "The psychological phenomena of intercommunication between two minds have been unfortunately little studied" (CP 6.161). This has changed in the years since he penned this observation. But the study of such phenomena still has not been carried forward far enough (see, however, RANSELL, 1998; SANTAELLA, 1999; and BERGMAN, 2009). A phenomenology of intercommunication, equipped with the resources of semeiotic, is, to a lamentable degree, still a task to be carried out. I would say simply the phenomena of intercommunication, strictly psychological or otherwise (e.g., cenoscopic or philosophical), call for closer attention than they have yet received. Such phenomena *of course* include reading.

#### 3.1 Poulet's phenomenology of reading

As far as I know, no theorist has investigated reading more brilliantly than Georges Poulet. Though he approaches his investigation without any reliance upon Peirce's writings, his insights and conclusions are in accord with Peirce's claims and convictions. For my purpose, then, no theorist is better suited to assist us in assembling notes for a phenomenology of reading than Poulet.<sup>17</sup> Allow me to quote him very generously.

A book is not shut in by its contours, is not walled up as in a fortress. It asks nothing better than to exist outside itself, or to let you exist in it. In short, the extraordinary fact in the case of a book is the falling away of the barriers between you and it. You are inside it; it is inside you; there is no longer either outside or inside" (54).<sup>18</sup>

---

16 The practices of reading require a normative account more generally, not simply a semeiotic one. From a Peircean perspective, the ethics of reading would be especially important.

17 In saying this, I do not mean to disparage or slight Poulet's accomplishment. Given the complexity of the topic and the brevity of Poulet's essay, however, it hardly seems a slight. A phenomenology of reading, fully realized, could not be achieved in the scope of fifteen pages, no matter how suggestive and insightful those pages are. Hence, I am disposed to regard his essay as notes for a project to be carried out much more fully. Of course, I will in this paper go only a very short distance toward that goal.

18 A. N. Whitehead refers to this as mutual immanence (e.g., the self is in the world and, in turn, the world is in the self).

In the act of reading, there occurs “the strange invasion of my person by the thoughts of another”; as a result, “I am a self who is granted the experience of thinking thoughts foreign to me. I am the subject of thoughts other than my own. My consciousness behaves as though it were the consciousness of another” (56; cf. KNAUSGAARD, 2017, p. 210-11). At this point Poulet makes what is in effect a Peircean point regarding the ideas being thought by the reader: “In a certain sense I must recognize that no idea really belongs to me. Ideas belong to no one. They pass from one mind to another as coins pass from hand to hand” (56). Peirce insists: Most ideas are not my creations. To a far greater extent, my psyche is their creation. This is even the case when ideas *are* mainly my creations. And this has profound implications for the seemingly simple act of reading, implications to be taken up in due course (Cf. CP 1.216-217).

“Each of the works, however, while I am reading it,” Poulet insists, “lives in me its own life” (58). Whatever knowledge I possess about a text (say, it was a piece written by this author in these circumstances, during a historical time marked by these specific developments) “does not suffice to illuminate for me in its own inner meaning [...] [that] which *animates* [...] the particular work” (58; emphasis added). “At this moment [of reading, when one is drawn from the world into the work], what matters to me is to live, from the inside, in a certain identity with the work and the work alone. It is there within me [and I within it], not to send me back, outside itself, to its author, nor to his other writings, but on the contrary to keep my attention riveted on itself” (58). “And it is the work, finally, which [...] takes hold of it [my consciousness], appropriates it, and makes of it that *I* which, from one end of my reading to the other, presides over the unfolding of the work, of the single work I am reading” (59). “The work lives its own life within me; in a certain sense, it thinks itself, and it gives itself a meaning within me” (59). It would be hard to find a more emphatic claim about the inherent agency of textual signs (the signs live their life in my consciousness and, beyond it, in my psyche: they think themselves in me, though I am completely complicit in their exercise of their determinative function).

I find these descriptions accurate and exquisite in their formulation. There is however a point at which I am strongly disposed to quarrel with Poulet’s depiction of what occurs in reading. “The consciousness inherent in the work is,” Poulet claims, “active and potent; it occupies the foreground; it is clearly related to its *own* world, to objects which are *its* objects” (59). So far, so good. But, then, he sacrifices the agency of the reader to that of the text: “In opposition [to the active, potent consciousness inherent in the work] [...] I play a much humbler role, content to record passively all that is going in me” (59).

### 3.2 The implications of Peirce’s thought for such a Phenomenology

While Peirce did not attempt to provide a phenomenology of reading, his semeiotic and synechistic account of mind and consciousness unquestionably carry implications for executing such a task. My purpose here is not even to commence this task, but rather simply to assemble some of those texts from Peirce’s writings in which these implications are readily discoverable. The many parallels with Poulet’s explicit account are also easily apprehended. This is nowhere truer than with regard to the “I” (the reader as an ego whose subjectivity is far less fixed, coherent, and fundamental

than we ordinarily appreciate). “The observation of facts has now taught us,” Peirce claims.” that the ego is a mere wave in the soul, a small and superficial feature” of the psyche (CP 1.112). That is, the ego is a relatively superficial phenomenon, far more the unwitting plaything of unconscious impulses or drives than the “I” is disposed to acknowledge (see, e.g., CP 1.631; cf. Freud).

The “I” or ego does not stand outside of the semiotic process as a sovereign agent, controlling that process from “on high” (CP 7.447, also 456). Rather the ego is inextricably caught up in this process, forging its precarious identity in the ongoing flux of multitudinous signs. In a series of cosmological essays published in *The Monist*, beginning with “The Architecture of Theories” (1891) and effectively concluding with “Reply to the Necessitarians” (1893),<sup>19</sup> and indeed elsewhere, Peirce uses the language of ideas rather than that of signs. It is however easy enough to translate what Peirce claims in the modernist terminology of ideas<sup>20</sup> into a semeiotic language. For the most part, then, I will leave it up to my readers to provide this translation.

The generation of ideas (i.e., the generation of signs) is, at the most basic or primordial level, “the generation “of ideas *by* ideas [emphasis added]. [...] [Some suppose that] an idea has to be connected with a brain, or has to inhere in a ‘soul.’ This is preposterous: the idea does not belong to the soul [cf. Poulet]; it is the soul that belongs to the idea. The soul does for the idea just what the cellulose does for the beauty of the rose; that is to say, it affords it opportunity. It is the court-sheriff, the arm of the law” (CP 1.216). There is something jarring in the transition from the penultimate sentence to the final one. The sentences leading up to this claim about “The arm of the law” appear to stress the firstness of thirdness, the generation of signs by signs, while reference to “the court-sheriff” appears to shift attention away from this to the role of secondness in this process. On this occasion, however, I merely note this.

Here as elsewhere Peirce is firm in his resolve to grant agency to signs and thereby to strip the human mind of its pretension to absolute sovereignty. As he puts it, ideas, or, better signs “are not all mere creations of this or that mind, but on the contrary have the power of finding or creating their vehicles” (CP 1.217). Self-conscious and self-critical minds evolve out of unconscious and acritical processes. It is no exaggeration, then, to take our minds to be the creation of signs over which they originally have no control and, ever afterwards, have only quite limited control. As mind matures into a self-critical and self-conscious agency, the agency of signs continues to operate, to exert an immense influence upon the personal minds of finite agents such as the human animal. Such minds never evolve beyond mutual dependency: they are as dependent as the signs they use as these signs are dependent upon the practices of these sign-users. So, we are bound to admit that humans and “signs reciprocally educate each other” (CP 5.313, also EP 1:54). The relationship

19 The series concludes with “Evolutionary Love” (1893) but this “Reply” needs to be read as part of it, not an entirely separate article in *The Monist*.

20 The idea of idea encountered in the writings of such figures as René Descartes and John Locke makes a radical break with the classical notion of *eidos* and the medieval understanding of species, as in intelligible species. Of course, Peirce devoted his life to replacing the “new way of ideas” with an even newer way of signs.

between human sign-users and the dynamic signs<sup>21</sup> with which human beings are bound up can never be more than one of mutual dependency or reciprocal education.

Human sign-users are, in a certain respect, identifiable with the signs used by them. They assume the form of one sign or another. Peirce is explicit—indeed, emphatic—about this: “When we think, then, *we ourselves*, as we are at that moment, *appear as a sign*” (CP 5.283, *emphasis added*). This is so familiar that we ordinarily fail to feel how extraordinary it is.

While existence or actuality is conceived by Peirce in its brute otherness, reality is envisaged as boundless intelligibility. What is, in whatever mode it partakes of being, is in principle other than any finite know takes it to be. But, insofar as it is real, it is intelligible: “real things are of a cognitive or significative nature, so that the real is that which signifies something real” (CP 5.320). They are in some way, to some extent, accessible to human inquirers. Peirce claims that saying that anything is, at once, irreducibly real and invincibly unknowable entails a contradiction (CP 5.255-58; EP 1:24-25).

But, for the purpose of seeing the implications of his thought for a phenomenology of reading, Peirce’s understanding of the self (or “personality”) is, at least, as important as this characterization of reality. No facet of this understanding is, moreover, more important than Peirce’s insistence upon the temporality of the self. “This personality [...] is,” he insists, “not a thing to be apprehended in an instant. It has to be lived in time; nor can any finite time embrace it in all its fullness. [...] Personality, so far as it is apprehended in a moment, is immediate self-consciousness” (CP 6.155). In the flow of reading, the temporality of the self is profoundly modified by how the reader “lives” time while engaged in this process. The self that is stretched across time and knows itself as such is *mediated* self-consciousness.

Peirce’s synechistic account of human subjectivity, mind, and consciousness stresses not only that each one of these is in itself a continuum (specifically, a temporal continuum) but also that the continuum of any self is continuous with countless other selves. In a sense, the intersection of two or more such continua is an instance in which self and other(s) flow into one another (see, e.g., CP 7.591), though only partially. This bears upon the self’s knowledge of other selves. While most accounts stress the asymmetry between how the self knows itself and how it knows others, Peirce’s brings these two modes of knowledge very close together: “The recognition by one person of another’s personality takes place by means to some extent identical with the means by which he is conscious of his own personality. The idea of a second personality [and not just the idea but] that second personality itself, enters within the field of direct consciousness of the first person, and is as immediately perceived as his ego [as *his* ego, also his *ego*], though less strongly.” Please note: Peirce is unhesitant in asserting that the other enters directly in the field of the self’s consciousness and is immediately known by the self as both other and a self. While self and other interpenetrate, neither dissolves, except perhaps momentarily or at most for a short duration, into the other. A sense of otherness qualifies our knowledge or consciousness of another self. “At the same time [that the other is immediately known], the *opposition* between the two persons is perceived, so that the externality of the second is recognized” (CP 6.160; EP 1:332; *emphasis added*).

---

21 Signs are living.

The self is far more an illusory being than we are likely to appreciate (SHORT, 1997, p. 304-307), hence the boundary between self and other is anything but insurmountable. Indeed, interpenetration of self and other, including that of my consciousness with the consciousness of the other, is one of the most salient features of our semiotic lives.

There are those who believe in their own existence, because its opposite is inconceivable; yet the most balsamic of all the sweets of sweet philosophy is the lesson that personal existence is an illusion and a practical joke. Those who have loved themselves [exclusively] and not their neighbors will find themselves April fools when the great April opens the truth that neither selves nor neighborselves were anything more than vicinities; while the love they would not entertain was the essence of every scent (CP 4.68; cf. CP 6.355ff.).

Nor must any synechist say, 'I am altogether myself, and not at all you.' If you embrace synechism, you must abjure this metaphysics of wickedness. In the first place, your neighbors, *are*, in a measure, yourself, and in a far greater measure than, without deep studies in psychology, you would believe [or even suspect]. Really, the selfhood you like to attribute to yourself is, *for the most part*, the vulgarest delusion of vanity. In the second place, all men who resemble you and are in analogous circumstances are, in a measure, yourself, though not quite in the same way in which your [more intimate] neighbors are (CP 7.571, *emphases added*).

Given Peirce's synechistic account of consciousness, mind, and self, the description of reading offered by Poulet is readily intelligible. Indeed, the doctrine of continuity disposes us to welcome an account in which the distinction between self and other, also that between the agency of signs and the agency of interpreters, is shown to be contextual, functional, and fluid. The self is no more imprisoned in its own consciousness than any book is frozen in the materiality of its inscriptions. To repeat, personal consciousness has an outreaching identity. So, too, the inscribed words of a given text has such an identity. On Cartesian assumptions, Poulet's descriptions are impossible: whatever reading is, it could not be *that!* On Peircean presuppositions, however, these descriptions appear to do justice to these phenomena and also, more generally, to accord with a pragmatist orientation toward the experiential world, a sphere of engagement in which identification with others is as commonplace as distancing of the self from itself. The process of reading is hardly unique in being a site in which the interplay of such identification and distancing repeatedly occurs, since this interplay is evident in virtually every arena of our activity.

#### **4 Dreaming of a Peircean theory of reading: adding Peirce to Scarry**

It is as easy for me to imagine a Peircean semeiotic of reading as a Peircean phenomenology of this form of semiosis. But it would be as difficult to execute as it

is easy to imagine. Even so, I want to sketch, if only in broad, quick, bold strokes, just such a theory. I am both inspired and guided by Scarry's efforts in *Dreaming by the Book*. Her book merits careful study and critical response. But this is not the occasion for either. Rather I will use her endeavor as a goad to undertake, *in my own way* (thus, in a Peircean manner), the task of considering what reading as reverie entails. While readers are dreaming in accord with instructions provided by authors, the expression "dreaming by the book" implies a strictly governed process. The amount of free play in reading is, however, great.

#### 4.1 Reading as reverie

An exploration of Peirce *as reader* would, I can only imagine, be both inherently fascinating and philosophically instructive. But, on this occasion, this is *not* the focus of my concern. Rather I want to seize this occasion as an opportunity to explore, a bit more, the process or activity of reading itself. Any number of factors, not least of all *my own* love of reading, dispose me to take up this task. (In Peirce, bibliophilia and biophilia are woven together. [Borges; Woolf])—As much as any one of these factors, however, there is Elaine Scarry's *Dreaming by the Book*, a fascinating exploration of specific procedures used by readers "to make objects move" (procedures such as radiant ignition). It would also be fascinating and instructive to engage the details of Scarry's account of reading, but for the most part I want to shift the focus from the center of her concern (how readers *imaginatively* follow the instructions of the text to move objects) to the activity of reading more generally. I however do want to appropriate her thesis, albeit with a different inflection: *reading is a form of reverie*. To read is to dream, but to do so in accord with a set of instructions provided for us, rather than a set devised by us. There are unquestionably various forms of dreaming, one of them being that indicated in her title (*dreaming by the book*). In English, however, the expression "by the book" (like "by the numbers") implies a strictness not altogether appropriate here. Reading is irreducibly a form of reverie and even the strictest adherence to the lexical meaning of the written words it allows for the play of imagination, not infrequently unbounded play. It does more than allow for the play of imagination: it invites, encourages, sustains, and intensifies such play.

Part of the paradox here is that the imagination of the reader, in being bound to the words on the page, experiences a sense of its own power and boundlessness. The *co-presence* of text and reader (in a sense, that of author and reader) is itself paradoxical in that, *on the one side*, the consciousness of the text *becomes* the consciousness of the reader (we live in the thoughts of another) and, *on the other side*, the consciousness of the reader becomes itself by its identification with another (POULET, 1969, p. 59-60). I have in fact not veered very far from Peirce. Indeed, I have not veered from him *at all*. Peirce observes,

[...] the psychologists undertake to locate various mental powers in the brain; and above all consider it as quite certain that the faculty of language resides in a certain lobe [of the brain]; but I believe it comes decidedly nearer the truth (though not really true) that language resides in the tongue (CP 7.364).

What he immediately adds is of greater relevance to our present purpose: “In my opinion it is much more true that the thoughts of a living author are in any printed copy of his book than they are in his brain” (Idem). If this is true, how much more are the thoughts of an author *in* the fluently read text rather than rigidly inscribed words. For Peirce at least, thought is not defined by interiority (cf. KENNY, 1968). Rather it is defined by its character of being irrepressibly “outreaching”: it cannot but reach beyond itself to whatever affords it an opportunity to root itself, grow, and in the process of growing contribute, however minimally or imperceptibly, to vast processes of evolutionary alteration. At least on Peirce’s account, the evolutionary does not preclude the revolutionary, for he stresses that rapid change following in the wake of cataclysmic events is one of the ways evolution takes place.

Texts provide us with opportunities for a unique form of semiotic reverie. Because of the extent to which the imagination is granted a license to exercise its power, I am hesitant to christen this form of reverie “dreaming *by the book*.” This might reduce to a quibble between Scarry and me, since she certainly appreciates the scope of operation provided by texts to the imagination, while I unhesitatingly acknowledge the constraints within which the imagination of the reader must operate. In reading, signs seize the psyche and make of it a medium for their self-unfolding. But in this instance the indispensable medium is a more or less complicit agent, often an agent whose provisional *identification* with the textual personae is so deep, thoroughgoing, and “immediate” that the reader is utterly lost in the lives of others. If we must lose our souls to save them, this occurs nowhere more frequently or effectively than when we insert ourselves into the flow of texts and enact imaginatively the dramas unfolding in that flow. Such enactment encompasses *identification with others*, others frequently as real, important, and influential as the flesh-and-blood beings with whom we have physical contact. The authorial or textual consciousness is overlaid on the reader’s and channels the direction of the reader’s reverie. Let us recall a line from Shakespeare’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, one of which Peirce was especially fond, better, to recall the passage in which this line occurs:

And as imagination bodies forth,  
The forms of things unknown, the poet’s pen  
Turns them to shapes and gives to airy nothing  
A local habitation and a name. (Act 5, Scene 1)

But while the poet gives the “airy nothing” a name, the reader adopts for the time being that name and, in this adoption, there is an indication of identification with the other. Whatever the local habitation, there is always a more intimate one—the psyche of the reader. That psyche is the medium in which the text *realizes* itself, one in which the grounded possibility of the immediate interpretant of a given text serves as soil in which signs root themselves and also out of which they surge sunward. The signs of the text reach out and claim the allegiance of the reader and, in doing so, the outreaching identities of the text and of the reader coalesce and mutually enliven and transform each other.

A philosopher who devoted so much of his life to reading, but tended not to make this activity the focus of his consideration, moreover, one who crafted both a

phenomenology and a theory of signs, might appropriately be taken as himself the sign of a missed opportunity. This seems hardly fair, since he in the most constrained of circumstances achieved so much. But *we* would be amiss if we continued to overlook what Peirce tended to neglect or simply slight. Thus, I want (to repeat) to seize this occasion as an opportunity to reflect upon the process of reading. Our *experience* of this process calls for phenomenological description. Notes for how to carry out the task of such a description have been assembled. Moreover, the forms of the process call for semeiotic analysis. Reading is obviously an instance of semiosis (or sign-activity). The action of textual signs on the psyche of the reader is more complex and, in a sense, magical than we ordinarily suppose. Part of my purpose in this paper is to bring this complexity and “magic” into focus. Let us, accordingly, assemble notes based on Peirce’s writings for carrying out *this* task.

#### 4.2 The dream of a Peircean account

This section is parallel to the one following my exposition of Poulet’s phenomenology of reading. There I did not try to reconstruct a Peircean phenomenology of this process, but simply gathered together some of the texts that would underwrite such a phenomenology. Here I will not endeavor to offer an account analogous to Scarry’s, but only collate some of the texts out of which such an account might be woven. The dream of reconstructing and elaborating a distinctively Peircean account of reading will remain at this time only a dream, but it is hardly a baseless fantasy. There is much in his writings that indicate that such an account is very much not only in the spirit of his semeiotic but also already partly enfolded in the details of that and other Peircean doctrines. My objective in this section is to render this claim plausible.

In general, the imagination plays a central role in Peirce’s thought. To conceive reading as reverie is in its way an acknowledgment of the importance of imagination. This is, I am confident, precisely where Peirce would commence any account of reading. The “whole business of ratiocination, and all that makes us intellectual beings, is,” he insists, “performed in imagination. Vigorous men are wont to hold mere imagination in contempt; and in that they would be quite right if there were such a thing” (CP 6.286). Imagination has a way of shaping conduct, to a far greater degree and ordinarily in more subtle ways than we suspect (see, e.g., CP 6.286; and CP 1-591-99). This is at least Peirce’s view of the power of imagination.

“We live in two worlds, a world of fact and a world of fancy.” There is however no absolutely sharp line of demarcation between these two worlds. Here as everywhere else Peirce’s synecism implies that the one shades into the other. “Each of us is accustomed to think that he is the creator of his world of fancy; that he has but to pronounce his fiat, and the things exist, with no resistance and no effort; and although this is so far from the truth that I doubt not that much the greater part of the reader’s labor is expended on the world of fancy [rather than that of fact], yet it is near enough the truth for a first approximation.” But it is only a first approximation. The world of fancy possesses its own secondness, just as that of fact is, in our efforts to render it intelligible, far more dependent on the imagination than we are likely to appreciate. But the secondness of fancy is hardly that of fact: the images we can conjure up and manipulate are often extremely malleable in the



mind's hands. "For this reason we call the world of fancy the internal world; the world of fact the external world. In this latter, we are masters, each of us, of his own voluntary muscles, and of nothing more. But man is sly, and contrives to make this little more than he needs" (EP 2:369).<sup>22</sup>

Observation is not limited to the objects and events encountered in our perceptual experience. While this is the paradigm form of observation, it is not the only one. We can "observe," if only in a derivative or degenerate sense, the constructions of our own imagination. Peirce is explicit about this:

[...] the imaginary constructions of the mathematician, and even dreams, so far approximate to reality as to have a certain degree of fixity, in consequence of which they can be recognized and identified as individuals. In short, there is a degenerate form of observation which is directed to the creations of our own minds (CP 2.305).

While the fabrications of our imagination sufficiently possess secondness to be observable, the symbols on which we rely, often themselves fabrications, possess, in themselves (i.e., in their firstness) the status of figments of dreams. Again, Peirce is explicit about this: "a symbol is, in itself, a mere dream" (CP 4.56). "A *meaning* is the associations of a word with images, its dream exciting power" (Ibid.). This does not run afoul of Wittgenstein's critique of a private language (his critique of the view of meaning as an invincibly private datum or phenomenon). For the power of the symbol to excite dreams or images is to be understood as pertaining to generalizable or communicable signs in which the iconic features are, in principle, available to virtually anyone.

Literary texts are often ones in which possibilities are projected an explored. This aligns them with hypoicons. "A possibility alone is," Peirce writes,

[...] an Icon purely by virtue of its quality; and its object can only be a Firstness. But a sign may be iconic [...] no matter what its mode of being. If a substantive be wanted, an iconic representamen [or sign] may be termed a *hypoicon*. Any material image [is, ...] in itself, without legend or label [...] may be called a *hypoicon*"(CP 2.277).

Hypoicons may be roughly divided according to the mode of Firstness of which they partake. Those which partake of simple qualities, or First Firstnesses, are images; those which represent the relations, mainly dyadic [...] of the parts of one thing by analogous relations in their own parts, are *diagrams*; those

---

22 "Every sane person," Peirce writes elsewhere, "lives in a double world, the outer and the inner world, the world of percepts and the world of fancies. What chiefly keeps these from being mixed us together is (besides certain marks they bear) everybody's well-knowing that fancies can be greatly modified by a certain nonmuscular effort, while it is muscular effort alone ... that can, to any noticeable degree, modify percepts. A man can be durably affected by his percepts and by his fancies. The way in which they affect him will be apt to depend upon his personal inborn disposition and upon his [acquired] habits" (EP 2:412-13).

which represent the representative character of a representamen by representing a parallelism in something else, are *metaphors* (CP 2.278).

Though metaphors are prominent features of many literary texts, diagrammatic signs in the extended sense proposed by Peirce are no less so.

Diagrams are defined functionally and Peirce uses the term more inclusively than it is ordinarily used. A literary description of, say, a cluttered desk would be a *diagram* in his sense. The skeletal character of most diagrams, including linguistic ones, should not prompt us to overlook their sensuous qualities. Indeed, the extent to which the sensuous images is so often interwoven with the diagrammatic function of linguistic signs, for the most part, what inclines us to miss in the case of speech just this function. But unlike images in the Peircean sense, diagrams rely mainly on analogous relationships, not sensuous qualities.

Let us return to the algebraic character of discursive signs. “All speech is,” Peirce suggests, “but an algebra, the repeated signs being the words, which have relations by virtue of the meanings associated with them” (CP 3.418). In characterizing speech as algebraic, Peirce is implying that it is diagrammatic. Linguistic diagrams are however typically more complex phenomena than, for example, a sparsely detailed map. The etymology of the word *algebra* (“reunion of broken parts” [OED]) points to the restoration or simply the exhibition of continuity. Broken parts might need to be reunited; so apparently disparate, though really connected, things need to be shown to be connected in ways not immediately evident (Peirce in WIENER [ed.], p. 390).

It should be no surprise that Peirce’s writings provide a wealth of resources for exploring the phenomena of reading. His semeiotic and synechistic account of mind, consciousness, and subjectivity points to an exploration very close to the one provided by Georges Poulet. In addition, the heuristic of his categorial framework<sup>23</sup> and his general theory of signs offer resources for carry out the kind of exploration undertaken by Elaine Scarry in *Dreaming by the Book*.

It is imperative to appreciate the role of Peirce as a reader but also to envision reading as a form of reverie. The library and study were as critical sites for Peirce’s experimental investigations as were the field and the laboratory (CP 1.34). The imagination and its flights were, moreover, as vital to these inquiries as were painstaking observations, logical analyses, and actual experimentation. Reading Peirce in conjunction with such writers as Poulet and Scarry encourages us to appreciate dimensions and possibilities in his work we might otherwise easily miss.

## 5 Conclusion

As much as any other activity, including writing and observation, certainly experimentation and musement, Peirce devoted himself to reading. It was integral to his quest of quests, his inquiry into the nature, forms, and conditions of inquiry.

---

23 I have only lightly touched up Peirce’s here, but a fuller account would of course detail their relevance to either the kind of project undertaken by Poulet in “Phenomenology of Reading” or Scarry in *Dreaming by the Book*.

As a scientist, he was a scholar, conversant with a vast literature. Peirce as a reader exhibited a remarkable capacity for attaining an “interior understanding” of philosophical positions with which he was deeply at odds. He dreamed of readers who would be animated by the passion to find out and who were willing to undertake in a sustained fashion the arduous work of thinking. He might even have suspected that reading itself is a form of reverie. Whatever is actually the case in this regard, we can graft onto what he says about imagination and symbols Elaine Scarry’s claim regarding reading as a form of dreaming. The power of words and other symbols to generate dreams, images formed both in accord with authorial instructions and drawn from the depths of the reader’s psyche, cannot be gainsaid. These images are not invincibly private, inherently mental. They are rather signs and, as such, they have the power to be replicated and instantiated in countless loci. They are defined principally not in terms of their qualitative aspects (e.g., their vivacity, vividness, indistinctness, flatness, or voluminosity), but in terms of their variable functions. The “images” in the commonplace sense are for the most part not ones in the technical Peircean sense: they are strictly speaking *diagrams* and *metaphors* to a greater extent than *images*. Nowhere is the truth of Peirce’s claim that “speech is but an algebra” (CP 3.418) more evident than in how speech functions in literary and philosophical texts. For what we undertake when we read is the task of reuniting or simply uniting what is disjointed or fragmented. *Whatever* serves as an image of, say, a character in a novel, allowing the reader within the bounds of the permissions granted by the author to identify with that fictive being, or simply to follow that character’s comings and goings, exertions and forbearances, functions as a sign of that character. What actually unfolds in the time of reading (whatever the sequence of images elicited by the words on the page or screen happens to be) is secondary to what the reader *would* be able to say regarding that being. The logical interpretants generated by an actual reading would range from initial interpretants to final or simply quasi-final ones (habits and alterations of habits).<sup>24</sup> Much is left indeterminate (Does Hamlet’s exact height, minutely calculated, matter in the least?). Ordinarily, however, enough is rendered sufficiently determinate for the purpose at hand. An authorially guided reverie unfolds and the reader effortlessly dons the mask of now this, now that character.<sup>25</sup> The identity of the reader fuses with that of the authorial consciousness.

24 Arguably, reading assists in cultivating what Friedrich Nietzsche calls “brief habits.” “I love brief habits,” he discloses, “and consider them an inestimable means for getting to know *many* things and states, down to the bottom of their sweetness and bitterness. My nature is entirely designed for brief habits” (*The Gay Science*, #295). “Enduring habits I hate. I feel as if a tyrant had come near me. [...] I feel grateful to all my misery and bouts of sickness and everything about me that is imperfect hate, because this sort of thing leaves me with a hundred backdoors through which I escape from enduring habits” (*ibid.*). “Most intolerable [...] would be for me a life entirely devoid of habits, a life that would demand perpetual improvisation” (*ibid.*). Reading is a process in which enduring and brief habits as well as innovations and improvisation show their complementary worth. Some enduring habits are anything but constraining: they are enhancements of, rather than limitations, on one’s power (Peirce, quoted in COLAPIETRO, 1989, p. 112).

25 “This willingness continually to revise one’s own location in order to place oneself in the path of beauty is,” Scarry suggests, “the basic impulse underlying education. One submits oneself to other minds (teachers) in order to increase the chance that one will be looking

Any sane person lives in two worlds, one of experiential fact and the other of fictive beings. There is however no sharp line of demarcation between the two. There is a region, perhaps a much larger one than we realize, where fact and fiction comeingle in ways difficult, if not impossible, to disentangle. The world of absolutely brute fact and that of utterly ethereal fiction are themselves abstractions from the everyday world of human experience wherein imagination and reverie play important roles as experience and logic.

As it turns out, the growth of concrete reasonableness includes the growth of human reverie, not least of all that of algebraic imagination in its various forms. Reading assists the growth of such imagination and of much else. This is a truth Peirce does not so much prove in his writings as one his life itself, in effect, demonstrates. If we read his life in the light cast by his burning passions and if we allow ourselves to be inspired by what we witness there, we are likely to become backwoodsmen ourselves, opening fields of inquiry he might not even have dreamed of. After all, *his* dream was to articulate a philosophy that would prove in practice to be of use to inquirers engaged in endeavors far beyond anything *he* could possibly imagine (CP 1.1). We are most faithful to Peirce when we assist him in realizing his dream of such a philosophy. We are no less faithful to him when we, rather paradoxically, are animated by his undreamt dreams. For in doing so we are carrying forward, in his restless spirit, the open-ended task of communal investigation, not least of all by attaining a more accurate methodological self-understanding. Such understanding involves acknowledging in our theories what is exemplified in our lives and practices.

## References

- BERGMAN, Mats. *Peirce's philosophy of communication*. London: Continuum. 2009.
- BERNSTEIN, Richard J. *Praxis and action: contemporary philosophies of human activity*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press. 1971.
- BRENT, Joseph. *Charles Sanders Peirce: a life*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press. 1998.
- COLAPIETRO, Vincent. *Peirce's approach to the Self*. Albany: SUNY Press. 1989.
- DESCARTES, René. *The philosophical works of Descartes*. Translated by Elizabeth S. Haldane and G. R. T. Rose. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 1972.
- DEWEY, John. *Experience and nature*. The later works of John Dewey. Edited by Jo Ann Boydston. Carbondale: SIU Press. 1988. v. 1.
- ECO, Umberto. *Interpretation and overinterpretation*. Edited by Stefan Collini. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 1992.
- EMERSON, R. W. *Ralph Waldo Emerson: selected essays*. Edited by Larzer Ziff: Penguin. 1982.

---

in the right direction when a comet makes its sweep through a certain patch of sky" (1999, p. 7). Reading provides innumerable opportunities for revising our location for the sake of placing ourselves possibly "in the path of beauty." In my judgment, Peirce's valorization of esthetics would prompt him to accept Scarry's point. Reading is in any event a tutelage in revising our location for the reason she gives and, indeed, for many other reasons.

FISCH, Max H. *Peirce, Semeiotic, and Pragmatism*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press. 1986.

KENNY, Anthony. Cartesian privacy. *Wittgenstein: A Collection of Critical Essays*, edited by George Pitcher (Notre Dame, IN University of Notre dame Press, 1968), 352-70.

KNAUSGAARD, Karl O. Fate. In: *Paris Review*. Issue 223, Winter, 2017.

NIETZSCHE, Friedrich. *The Gay Science*. Translated by Walter Kaufmann. New York: Vintage Books. 1974.

PEIRCE, C. S. *The Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce*, volumes 1-6 edited by Charles Hartshorne and Paul Weiss, volumes 7 & 8 by Arthur W. Burks. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press. 1931-1958. [Cited as CP followed by the volume number and paragraph number].

\_\_\_\_\_. *Contributions to the Nation*. Edited by Kenneth L. Ketner and James Cook. Lubbock: Texas Tech University Press. 1975.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Charles S. Peirce: selected writings*. Edited by Philip W. Wiener. New York: Dover Publications. 1958.

\_\_\_\_\_. *The essential Peirce*. Volume 1. Edited by Nathan Houser and Christian Kloesel. Bloomington: Indiana University Press. 1992. [Cited as v. 1, p. xx: EP 1:xx].

\_\_\_\_\_. *The essential Peirce*. Volume 2. Edited by the Peirce Edition Project. Bloomington: Indiana University Press. 1998. [Cited as v. 2, p. xx: EP 2:xx].

\_\_\_\_\_. *Writings of Charles S. Peirce: a chronological edition*. Volume 6. Edited by the Peirce Edition Project. Bloomington: Indiana University Press. 2000. [Cited as v. 6, p. xx: W 6:xx].

POLET, Georges. Phenomenology of reading. In: *New Literary History*. v. 1, n. 1, p. 53-68, 1969.

RANSDALL, Joseph. Sciences as communicational communities. 1998. Available at: <http://www.iupui.edu/~arisbe/menu/library/aboutcsp/ransdell/PHYSICS.HTM>

SANTAELLA, Lucia. Methodeutics: the liveliest branch of semeiotics. In: *Semiotica*. v. 124, 3/4, p. 377-95, 1999.

\_\_\_\_\_. *O método anti-cartesiano de C. S. Peirce*. São Paulo: UNESP/FAPESP. 2004.

\_\_\_\_\_. The cognitive function of iconicity. 2017.

SCARRY, Elaine. *Reading by the Book*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. 2001.

SHORT, T. L. Hypostatic abstraction and self-consciousness. In: BRUNNING, J.; and FORSTER, P. (Editors). *The rule of reason: the philosophy of Charles Sanders Peirce*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press. 1997. p. 289-308.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Peirce's Theory of Signs*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 2007.

TRILLING, Lionel. *Freud and the crisis of our culture*. Boston: Beacon Press. 1955.