World oriented self-formation as sublimation: or why postphenomenology needs Peircean pragmatism

Autoformação orientada para o mundo como sublimação: ou por que a pós-fenomenologia precisa do pragmatismo peirciano

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Abstract: Postphenomenology is an approach in philosophy of technology that investigates how technologies influence and shape world and self. Although postphenomenology has from the beginning expressed the ambition to offer a nonessentialist and nonfoundational framework, a structural development of this aspect is virtually absent. A Peircean pragmatism, as will be proposed, can provide this framework. The view of self-formation as sublimation, which will be derived from Peircean pragmatism, attempts to recognize that our environment, which is increasingly a technological environment and subject to radical change, greatly shapes who we are and influences who we ought to be and, at the same time, resists the idea that the self is not more than a plaything of contingent influences and forces.

Keywords: Peirce. Postphenomenology. Pragmatism. Self-formation. Sublimation.

Resumo: *A pós-fenomenologia é um enfoque na filosofia da tecnologia que investiga como as tecnologias influenciam e moldam o mundo e o ego. Embora a pós-fenomenologia tenha expressado desde o início a ambição de oferecer uma estrutura não-essencialista e não-fundacionista, o desenvolvimento estrutural desse aspecto está virtualmente ausente. O pragmatismo peirciano, como será proposto, pode fornecer essa estrutura, bem como os blocos de construção para o desenvolvimento da visão da autoformação em termos de sublimação. Essa visão tenta reconhecer que nosso ambiente, que é cada vez mais um ambiente tecnológico e sujeito à mudança radical, molda consideravelmente quem nós somos e influencia quem deveremos ser. E, ao mesmo tempo, resiste à ideia de que o ego não é mais do que um joguete de influências e forças contingentes.*

Palavras-chave: *Autoformação. Peirce. Pós-fenomenologia. Pragmatismo. Sublimação.*

1 Introduction

Contemporary philosophy is predominantly anti-essentialist: it rejects the idea of a fixed nature, as well as that of a one-directional, teleologically shaped future; it believes, at least potentially, in unlimited and unbounded self-formation. In order to realize this ideal, advocates of postmodernism attempt to reveal and debunk ideas, practices and habits that still are subject to essentialist views of human and world.

In recent years, developments in technology and the emergence of a digital society have further strengthened the view that we are able to determine and control the course of our lives. Trans- and posthumanists, and other techno-optimists, have highlighted this "sky is the limit" prospect: if new technologies enable us to form ourselves as we please, why then not also boundlessly enhance ourselves? Progress in and cross-fertilization between nanotechnology, biotechnology, information and communication technology, and cognitive and neuroscience (the co-called NBIC convergence) indicates, these advocates believe, that life can be changed, formed, and even created. Today we are witnessing an explosion of books, articles and debates dealing with different types of biological, psychological and moral enhancement.

Critics of trans- and posthumanism often focus on the dangers and risks of these upcoming technologies. From a predominantly ethical point of view, they emphasize a strong "is"-"ought" distinction: maybe we *are* able to successfully develop and implement these technologies, but that does not imply that we *ought* to do that. Responses vary from total legal and moral prohibition of certain technologies to the introduction of different precautionary principles.

There are also approaches that focus on how exactly old and new technologies are transforming our environment and on how they are influencing the way we experience our world and ourselves. Endorsing a so-called "empirical turn" in philosophy of technology, instead of reflecting on "technology" with a capital "T," they study how particular technologies in specific practices and contexts influence societies and humans. In line with these approaches, I have proposed that the influence of technologies is more radical then is often envisaged: not only are technologies changing our world and practices, but they are also influencing our values, goals and ideals (AYDIN, 2015; 2018). I have endorsed the view that technologies are not mere instruments but that they are normative, that they "norm" our practices, habits and believes. New and emerging technologies are not neutral means but bring about new and different standards for determining what are "normal," "healthy" and "enhanced" capacities (AYDIN, 2017).

The question that I want to address in this paper is: how can "self-formation" be captured as "self-enhancement" in a technological world that seems to be increasingly unable to offer *a priori*, univocal standards for establishing what is successful or good self-formation? First, I will briefly discuss postphenomenology, which is an approach in philosophy of technology that investigates how actual technologies mediate experiences of the world and ourselves. Although postphenomenology has expressed from the beginning the ambition to also provide a nonessentialist and nonfoundational framework, a structural development of this aspect is virtually absent. I will propose that a Peircean approach not only can complement postphenomenology but is also of vital importance for developing

a view that, on the one hand, acknowledges the deep and sometimes disruptive influence of a changing and increasingly technological environment on the self, and, on the other hand, justifies the possibility of successful or good self-formation and, hence, preserves a certain notion of "self-enhancement."

2 Postphenomenology

The postphenomenological approach in philosophy of technology (IHDE, 1990; VERBEEK, 2005; ROSENBERGER and VERBEEK, 2015) investigates how technology influences the relations between human beings and the world. Building upon the phenomenological tradition of especially Husserl and Heidegger, it endorses the view that subjects and objects cannot be separated but are intertwined: "being conscious" is always "being conscious of something." Humans cannot detach themselves from the world and neutrally observe it from a third person perspective but are always immersed in and engaged with the world.

However, postphenomenology adds an important element to classic phenomenological "intentionality," namely "technology." Instead of "intentionality," as being always directed at something, it focuses on "technological intentionality:" technology increasingly shapes how we are directed at the world. From this perspective, technologies are not primarily seen as objects in the material world that are used by human subjects but rather as "mediators" that shape the *relations* between humans and world in a certain way. When we drive a car, look through glasses, have an MRI scan, rely on GPS, or post a tweet, we are not focused on the technologies that we use but rather on the streets that we cross, the book that we are reading, our bodies that we are concerned about, the destination that we are trying to reach, and the people that we are messaging. Of course, these technologies could also become objects that we focus on but that often only happens when they don't function the way they should or break down, just as I only realize that I am wearing glasses when they are fogged up. If technologies function well, they are not just part of the world but rather *mediate* our relations with the world. This "mediation," and, this is crucial, is not neutral, since they disclose and structure the world in particular ways. Think of a telescope or an ultrasound machine. They not only have practical influences but also introduce new goals, shape new ways of sense-making, and influence our decisions.

Don Ihde has tried to categorize the different ways in which technologies mediate our relations with the world. He identified four types of mediations: "embodied," "hermeneutic," "alterity" and "background." The prime example of an embodied mediation is a pair of glasses that we do not look *at* but look *through*: if it functions well, it becomes, as a part of our body, completely transparent. A thermometer is the prime example of a hermeneutic mediation, since we "read it": it does not give us a sensation but rather a number that represents the temperature. The prime example of an alterity mediation is an ATM machine, since in interacting with it we treat it as an alternative other that facilitates taking money from a bank account. An air conditioning system illustrates well what is a background mediation: although it is not always perceived, it has a great influence on how people experience their environment. These four categories are by no means conclusive, since other authors have added other categories to the list, like "cyborg" and "immersion"

mediations that take into account emerging technologies like prosthetics and deep brain stimulation (see ROSENBERGER and VERBEEK, 2015, p. 1-6). Crucial in all these different categories is that human intentionality is mediated by technologies in a different way: the technologies shape and structure the way we are directed at the world.

Postphenomenology had from the beginning the ambition to combine nonessentialist and nonfoundational pragmatism with a focus on how actual technologies mediate experiences of world and self. In addition to the concepts of "mediation" the notion of "multistability" has been extensively studied and applied to different fields of research and case studies. Often the concept of "multistability" is used to illustrate how technologies, on the one hand and often initially, can be designed by us to realize certain goals that we have set for ourselves and, on the other hand and often eventually, influence, restrict, lead, incline, and determine our choices and behaviour. Don Ihde provides a nice and short description of "multistability": "No technology is 'one thing,' nor is it incapable of belonging to multiple contexts" (1999, p. 47). The idea is that technologies can have various but limited meanings and functions: "only some relations prove experientially stable" (ROSENBERGER & VERBEEK, 2015, p. 26). A standard example to illustrate multistability is the Necker cube visual illusion. Building on the pragmatic commitment to anti-essentialism and context-dependency, the notion of "multistability" rejects the Husserlian idea that variational analysis enables discovering the essence of an object of study. Against essentialist approaches, this notion expresses the context-dependency and materially-situated relationality of technology. In combination with the idea of "mediation," the notion of "multistability" highlights the postphenomenological view that what we consider our world and our self is increasingly mediated in different but limited ways by old and new technologies. We have no access to an original, unmediated world or self.

Although the postphenomenological notions of "technological intentionality" and "multistability" give some suggestions for developing a nonessentialist account of world and self, they do not provide the necessary, basic structures for an alternative framework. Moreover, postphenomenological studies focus predominantly on the world and worldly practices and cases. "Cyborg" and "immersion" relations have bearing on how we experience the self (VERBEEK, 2008) but a framework that illustrates how our technological environment is deeply shaping the self, without having to reduce it to a plaything of contingent circumstances, is missing. I propose that complementing the postphenomenological approach with Peirce's pragmatism and, especially, his phenomenology of the categories, could contribute to a better understanding of self and self-formation in a technological world.

3 Peirce's phenomenological categories

Peirce, strongly influenced by both Kant and Duns Scotus, attempts to combine the best of transcendental idealism with the best of realism. He discovers that in our encounters with the world we always and necessarily have to adopt or presuppose three phenomenological categories, which he simply calls the categories of Firstness, Secondness, and Thirdness. Whatever we describe or experience, regardless of it

being a thing, a fact, an event, a fantasy, or a hallucination, contains or presupposes always necessarily these three categories (see also AYDIN, 2007; 2009).

The category of Firstness is probably of all three categories the most difficult to grasp. Peirce defines Firstness as "feeling-quality" (MS [R] 339:108r); "the mode of being of that which is such as it is, positively and without reference to anything else" (CP 8.328). Peirce emphasizes that this "feeling-quality", as he understands it, has a simple and singular character. At the same time, however, he claims that qualities show not only a variety, but even "unlimited and uncontrolled variety and multiplicity" (CP 1.302; cf. CP 5.44). That seems contradictory, but it is not. The absolutely unrelated and irreducible singularity of Firsts does not imply that there are concrete entities that are absolutely independent. Firstness refers to the realm of possibilities. The absolutely unrelated and irreducible singularity of Firstness implies that each phenomenon contains an element characterized by undefinable originality, spontaneity, and openness. By virtue of this fundamental openness there *can* be an unlimited variety and multiplicity of things, which refers to the *impossibility* of completely ordering, identifying and confining what presents itself. This realm secures the possibility of absolute novelty, i.e. unactualized possibilities that always "transcend" the domain of our world of actual objects and facts.

Peirce denotes Secondness as brute reaction, contrast and opposition (MS [R] 339:108r); it is "that which is what it is by force of something to which it is second." (CP 1.356). Secondness "consists in its happening *then* and *there*" (CP 1.24), and expresses the particular "thisness" of an individual thing, its *hæcceities*, as Peirce calls it in line with Duns Scotus (CP 1.405, CP 3.460). In Peirce's words: "Initially an object does not distinguish itself from other objects by unique recognizable features, but by the compulsion or pressure it exerts on our attention" (CP 6.318, CP 1.325, CP 7.551). It is by virtue of this compulsion, this antagonistic perseverance (CP 1.432), that it has existence and individual reality.

According to Peirce, existence, actuality and individuality are fundamentally characterized by interaction, that is, by action and counteraction. But we need to be careful here: interaction in this regard must not be understood as the impact of one object and the response of another. "Interaction" in this respect is irreducible and undeductible. A clarifying example:

> Suppose I try to exercise my strength in lifting a huge dumbbell. If I strive to lift it, I feel that it is drawing my arm down. If I suffer no consciousness of having my arm pulled down, I can have no consciousness of exerting force in lifting the dumbbell. To be conscious of exerting force and to be conscious [of] having force used upon me are the same consciousness (CP 7.543).

Of course, we can distinguish between a weight lifter that pushes a halter upward and a dumbbell that resists being pushed up. But we cannot say that first there is a "weight lifter" and a "halter" that then interact with each other. Rather, the reverse is the case: weight lifters do not lift weights, but weightlifting makes someone a weight lifter. "Halter" and "weight lifter" are what they are in and by virtue of the weight lifting activity.

Expressed more generally: there is not a self, on the one hand, and a world, on the other, which then interact. It is precisely this essentialist view that I try to bring into question with the help of Peirce: "the idea of a reaction is not the idea of two *plus* forcefulness" (CP 7.266). It is by virtue of interaction that we can make a distinction between ourselves and the world. Something individual emerges by virtue of its contrast or interaction with something else. My notion of "world oriented self-formation" is greatly inspired by this view.

Thirdness is characterized as an idea, rule or orientation. To relate different elements to one other and recognize a unified whole, a certain *orientation* or general *idea* is required: "thirdness is mediation" (MS [R] 339:108r); "the mode of being of that which is such as it is, in bringing a second and third into relation to each other" (CP 8.328). Thirdness is something that connects, mediates or intervenes. It is the "thread of life" (CP 1.337). Without this element, there would be no order and continuity in the things we encounter.

Peirce's characterization of a Thirdness as a kind of law or general rule is of crucial importance. He argues that the tendency of future events to conform to a general rule does not have a mere conceptual status. Against what he calls nominalists who believe that "this general rule is nothing but a mere word or couple of words," Peirce states that the indisputable fact that the general is of the nature of thought does not imply that it is also a product of our thinking (Cf. CP 1.26 and CP 1.27); nominalists confuse "thinking" with "thought". Realists—like Peirce—do not make that mistake and understand that our thinking "only apprehends and does not create thought, and that that thought may and does as much govern outward things as it does our thinking" (CP 1.27). Ideas can have an objective reality; their reality manifests itself in their predictive power. Peirce's notion of "percepts" can shed more light on the relation between thought and thinking.

4 Being-in-the-world: Peirce on percepts

In a critique of the Cartesian view, Peirce states that thinking is not instigated by internal impressions but that rather everything starts with what he sometimes calls "percepts," which are "out in the open." Peirce repudiates the idea that we have immediate access to our "inside realm" and a mediated access to the outside world. That is why he can say: "It is the external world that we directly observe" (CP 8.144). Thinking is not instigated by "introspection" but by "extrospection." Although in this reversal Peirce still uses an inside–outside distinction, his argument ultimately culminates in a kind of collapse of that distinction. By depriving introspective knowledge of "immediacy" and "transparency" the criteria for what it means to be "internal" are blurred and, hence, the very distinction between "internal" and "external" becomes opaque.

Peirce's perspective is neatly expressed in the following passage: "We first see blue and red things. It is quite a discovery when we find the eye has anything to do with them, and a discovery still more recondite when we learn that there is an ego behind the eye, to which these qualities properly belong. Our logically initial data are percepts" (CP 8.144). The (phenomeno)logical sequence is here of great importance. The percepts that instigate the cognitive process precede for Peirce every possible distinction, including a distinction between "inside" and "outside." That we

attach to percepts a subject with a brain is something that logically (Peirce makes a distinction between a psychological and a (phenomeno)logical perspective) takes place afterwards. We should not reverse this sequence and presume that meaning and thought are located in, let alone produced by an inner brain world. Peirce's repudiation of introspection has a phenomenological basis. All other less basic disciplines, including ethics, logic, metaphysics, and the sciences, are dependent on the elementary findings that phenomenology offers.

Peirce stresses, and this is crucial, that these percepts have a mental character. This, however, does not mean that they are products of individual brain processes. Indeed, "[t]hought is", according to Peirce, "not necessarily connected with a brain. It appears in the work of bees, of crystals, and throughout the purely physical world; and one can no more deny that it is really there, than that the colors, the shapes, etc., of objects are really there" (CP 4.551; see also WATTS, 2008, p. 190, 191, 199, 201). Our world of objects and artifacts does not only consist of matter but also of mind. This is almost hyperbolically expressed in a footnote of a text from 1884: "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, n.1; see also AYDIN, 2007). If we are immersed in thoughts and the world is saturated with mind, the very distinction between an, "inside world of human mind" and an, "outside world of material objects" becomes obsolete.

A question that could be raised in response to this view: if mind is so fully pervasive of the universe, what is the principle of individuation that allows us to talk of minds and selves in the plural? It must be clear that Peirce's perspective does not allow for a pre-given unique, inside as the principle of individuation. In his most anti-individualist writings the individual is for Peirce not more than a privation: "Psychological analysis shows that there is nothing which distinguishes my personal identity except my faults and my limitations" (CP 1.673). We discover ourselves as distinct selves if we are not able to sufficiently connect to our environment. Peirce's aim is, however, not the destruction of the individual but rather the situation of the individual within a broader whole. A self develops a particular identity by virtue of its very empirical interactions and continuous attempts to govern and regulate them by certain social habits, which enable it to adequately respond to its environment. Although I cannot further elaborate this argument here (see AYDIN, 2009, for Peirce's view of individuality), it indicates again Peirce's belief that we are not detached, atomistic egos living in a separate inside world but "cells of a social organism" (CP 1.673), who discover and develop themselves through interaction with their environment.

5 World oriented self-formation

Peirce's radical overcoming of the inside-outside distinction displays the self as being-in-the-world. Possibility, interaction and regularity are not only the general constitutive elements of material objects, but also of our self – which does not imply that these categories are equally dominant in, for example, stones, spiders and human beings (see also MUOIO, 1984; COLAPIETRO, 1989). The category of Firstness indicates that the human subject is not an invariable substance, but is fundamentally characterized by indeterminateness. By virtue of this indeterminateness we are not

necessitated by pre-given structures or instincts, in the degree that animals are, which is a requisite for the adjustment and re-adjustment of our conduct, as well as for real novelty.

Peirce's category of Secondness implies that the subject has only an individual identity by virtue of its natural and social interactions: we do not have a self before interacting, but we can only manifest ourselves by virtue of our interactions. One could say that a person is nothing else than her interactions. This seems to result in a contrasting view: on the one hand, we are characterized by absolute indeterminateness by virtue of Firstness; on the other hand, we seem to be totally necessitated by virtue of Secondness. We are, according to Peirce, indeed both undetermined and necessitated.

But there is more: it is not a coincidence that Peirce defines his third category as "the Idea of that which is such as it is as being a Third, or Medium, between a Second and its First" (CP 5.66). Thirdness mediates between absolute indeterminateness and sheer necessity. By bringing these both aspects together it imparts, on the one hand, form and regularity to the indeterminate multiplicity of interactions that we are constituted by, and, on the other hand, it soaks off the rigid constraints that the world imparts on us. What we call our self is a never completely fixed multiplicity of interactions that is governed and regulated by certain habits, laws, or ideas. It is by virtue of the possibility of giving our various, scattered interactions a durable form, which we can adjust continuously, that we possess a certain degree of freedom.

Understanding the self on the basis of Peirce's three categories displays the self as divided and multifocal. In an article named *What Pragmatism is* (1905) Peirce defines, in the line of Plato, the thinking of a person as an inner dialogue.[1] He writes:

> […] a person is not absolutely an individual. His thoughts are what he is "saying to himself," that is, is saying to that other self that is just coming into life in the flow of time. When one reasons, it is that critical self that one is trying to persuade; and all thought whatsoever is a sign […]. The second thing to remember is that the man's circle of society (however widely or narrowly this phrase may be understood), is a sort of loosely compacted person, in some respects of higher rank than the person of an individual organism (CP 5.421).

We can, first of all, learn from this passage that a person does not coincide with her actual individuality, with her Secondness. A person is, at the same time, a symbolic being; she is to a high degree Thirdness. Because a person does not completely coincide with her actual self, her *thisness* (*hæcceities*) at this time and in this place, she is able to anticipate a future critical self that she wants to convince—maybe we could call this future critical self the person's conscience. This means that because a person can transcend her actual state, she possesses a certain degree of self-

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1   There are intriguing relations between Peirce's view on the self and the notion of the so-called "dialogical self" that has received growing interest in the last decades, especially from scholars who work on the border of social psychology, sociology, and philosophy. See for an illuminating overview Norbert Wiley's (2006) *Pragmatism and the Dialogical Self*.

control. By virtue of Thirdness a person has the capacity to govern and regulate her interactions with the world by forming and modifying her conduct.

Secondly, Peirce emphasizes in this passage that a man's social circle is a kind of person that is in a certain sense of a higher order. This indicates that the habits or laws that a person has to incorporate in order to regulate the multiplicity of her interactions cannot be determined by sheer individual preferences, but should be discovered in a communal quest for, what Peirce sometimes calls, the *summum bonum.* This *summum bonum* is a kind of orientation or goal that is situated in the future and enables deliberate and critical self-reflection.

Peirce not only claims that we can govern and regulate our interactions with the world, but he also presupposes that one can make a distinction between good ways and bad ways to give ourselves a certain form. The fact that (self-)criticism is possible already implies for Peirce this distinction. He presupposes that we can make a distinction between good reasoning and bad reasoning, and between good conduct and bad conduct. In short, he presupposes that there are norms, criteria and goals that indicate what is good self-formation.

6 Self-formation as sublimation

As we have seen, Peirce attempts to illustrate that in our encounters with the world, we always and necessarily have to adopt Firstness, Secondness, and Thirdness. These categories subsequently correspond with the elements of novelty, brute interactions and regularity. We have seen that, according to Peirce, self-formation is only possible if we impart a form to ourselves by virtue of an orientation toward certain goals and ideals. Self-formation is depicted as a challenge, as something that is not simply given but should be realized. For Peirce, goals and ideals are imperative in the process of self-formation. Without goals and ideals, which we derive from the society that we happen to live in, imparting a form to ourselves is impossible.

Since the orientation towards goals and ideals is a normative challenge, the question is not only how self-formation is possible but also how we ought to form ourselves. Peirce acknowledges that people, depending on the society in which they live, devote themselves to different, and possibly opposing goals and ideals, which nevertheless enable them to organize their interactions and to develop themselves in a certain direction. In addition, these goals and ideals are established and continuously assessed and adjusted in concrete interactions with the world: new scientific findings, unpredictable events or unexpected experiences (Firstness), could destabilize certain conceptions and challenge established habits, which would prompt the adjustment of pursued goals and ideals. For this reason Peirce stresses that goals and ideals are virtual, since they are always situated in the future and always subject to adjustment and correction. This approach indicates that Peirce does not ignore the view that societal values and norms are not fixed but subject to change and disruption, both synchronically and diachronically. However, he also believes society, under certain conditions, can evolve and gradually dissolve aggressively contesting goals, values, ambitions and aspirations, as well as enable critical self-formation. Instead of posing the individual against society, he considers individuals, as we have seen, as "cells of a social organism" (CP 1.673), who discover and develop themselves in an interaction with their environment.

Peirce conceives self-formation not as an isolated, individual challenge but situates it in a social environment that can constructively contribute to ever-more apt interactions with and conceptions of what we encounter. In the process of forming ourselves by virtue of certain ideas, goals and ideals we attempt to persuade "a future, critical self," which is not another individual person, but a personified community, *i.e.*, a virtual interlocutor who can question my ideas, goals and ideals continuously from different points of view. This implies that the social is always present in the individual.

In contrast to philosophers like Nietzsche (and many others influenced by Nietzsche), Peirce does not value society as such as a danger (although some societies could be perverse, constraining and suffocating) but rather considers personified community as a "critical self" that is a necessary condition for enriching and improving self-formation. Without goals and ideals that transcend immediate individual feelings, drives and actions, self-criticism could not be genuine, since real criticism requires standards that cannot be reduced to the individual's preferences; otherwise it would be a bit like having a butcher inspecting the quality of his own meat. Those ideals are also subject to criticism but again that is only possible in the light of yet a higher ideal that we want to realize; and so on. It must be clear that in order to be able to challenge societal goals and ideals, favorable conditions need to be created. For Peirce, a healthy, open society is characterized by built-in mechanisms and tools (democratic regulations, informed consent, the possibility to opt-out, etc.) that enable people to deliberately and critically identify themselves or not-identify themselves with certain needs and desires, including the goals and ideals that society finds preferable. Crucial in this line of reasoning is that criticism does not exclude but rather requires anticipating standards and ideals that transcend individual, particular preferences.

Ultimately we have to appeal, Peirce says, to an ultimate ideal that is in itself admirable, "a habit of feeling which has grown up under the influence of a course of self-criticisms and of heterocriticisms" (CP 1.573f). For Peirce this ultimate ideal that gradually manifests itself under the influence of a course of criticisms from different directions is mirrored in a perfectly cultivated emotional life form. As far as I know, Peirce never uses the term "sublimation" to characterize this perfected type of self-formation. However, I believe this term is very suitable to his characterization of the ultimate ideal:

> I should say that an object, to be esthetically good, must have a multitude of parts so related to one another as to impart a positive simple immediate quality to their totality; and whatever does this is, in so far, esthetically good, no matter what the particular quality of the total may be (EP 2:201).

Developing a sense for the esthetic ideal entails forming, one could say, a sublime practical and emotional disposition. This general disposition enables the orientation towards goals by virtue of which ever more meaningless, useless, and inefficient parts of the social organism are related to one another in such a way that they become meaningful, useful and efficient. Instead of denying, repressing or cutting of parts of the organism that do not seem to fit, the challenge is to gradually integrate them and use them to strengthen and further develop the organism. Peirce also stresses the idea that this integration of parts within a whole should not be achieved

at the expense of multitude and diversity: "See that self-government is exercised; but be careful not to do violence to any part of the anatomy" (MS 675:15-16).

From a Peircean perspective diversity and regulation do not exclude one another but diversity can only be preserved and intensified *by* its submission to a form or idea. He sometimes uses the terms "evolutionary love" or "creative love" to indicate how diversity and regulation could go together. I recall a significant passage in his work that attempts to explain how this is possible:

> The movement of love is circular, at one and the same impulse *projecting creations into independency* and *drawing them into harmony*. This seems complicated when stated so; but it is fully summed up in the simple formula we call the Golden Rule. […] It is not by dealing out cold justice to the circle of my ideas that I can make them grow, but by cherishing and tending them *as I would the flowers in my garden*. […] Love, recognizing germs of loveliness in the hateful, gradually warms it into life, and makes it lovely (CP 6.288f., *my italics*).

Instead of exercising brute force (Secondness) that would restrict and confine, the "movement of love" evokes, arouses, infects (Thirdness) a thing to realize its potential, to develop itself from something homogenous and undifferentiated to a well-organized heterogenous and differentiated form.

Applied to the self, we can say that sublimation is a type of self-formation that involves, not restricting or cutting of parts of the self but rather accepting and transfiguring even the meaningless, useless and hateful parts, and stimulating the realization of their constructive potential by imparting on them a form by virtue of a certain ideal. This explains why ideals that are more inclusive are better than those that are less inclusive, and why the ultimate ideal that can include all parts of the organism and prompts them to constructive, maximum self-realization is the most admirable ideal.

Sublimation, as I understand it, entails imposing form to multitude and diversity, which is a necessary condition for actualizing potentialities. However, it is the orientation towards goals and ideals, and eventually towards an ultimate ideal, that can bring about maximum inclusion, regulation and self-realization. Moreover, for Peirce it is crucial that the orientation towards the ultimate ideal, which is a regulative ideal projected in the future, is not an individual but a social enterprise that takes place within an endless community of critical minds, an ideal that gradually brings about "a habit of feeling which has grown up under the influence of a course of self-criticisms and of heterocriticisms." Self-formation as sublimation, we could say, necessarily entails seeking beyond our actual, individual preferences and becoming part of a bigger, even a cosmic process.

7 Sublimation in a technological era

We have seen that both postphenomenology and Peircean pragmatism repudiate the idea of an invariable and autonomous self: the self cannot withdraw itself from its environment in an inner sphere; its interactions are not additional but constitutive; the self is formed by virtue of its interactions with an increasingly

technological environment. Both approaches also recognize an element of indeterminacy or multistability in world and self. The postphenomenological approach enables detailed analyses of how specific technologies mediate, change, and shape both world and self. Although postphenomenology claims that it has, besides phenomenological, pragmatist roots, a structural development of a nonessentialist and nonfoundational framework is lacking. I have tried to show that Peirce can offer such a framework. Moreover, the relevance of, especially, goals and ideals in Peirce's pragmatism could contribute to (recent) attempts in postphenomenology to counterpart the objection that it lacks normative grounding and tends towards relativism.

Instead of conceiving self-formation as "enhancement" in terms of context-independent and functionalist criteria, I have proposed, building on Peircean pragmatism, that it is more adequate and feasible to understand it in terms of "sublimation." Or alternatively: "enhancement" could be reinterpreted in terms of "sublimation." The view of self-formation as sublimation attempts to recognize that our environment, which is increasingly a technological environment and subject to radical change, greatly shapes who we are and influences who we ought to be and, at the same time, resists the idea that the self is not more than a plaything of contingent influences and forces, rendering the possibility to form ourselves in a good way an illusion. The proposed framework attempts to do justice to both the impact of society on the self and the potential of the self to impose a unique, singular form to itself that can be considered suitable and admirable.

If we bring together the different aspects of "sublimation" that I elaborated, and take into account the role that technology plays in self-formation, we can sketch the contours of a view of self-formation as sublimation in a technological environment. In its turn this general framework could be further complemented and sophisticated by a postphenomenological analysis of specific technologies that have impact on our lives, which I leave for future research.

Intrinsically bound to the proposed view of self-formation as sublimation, there are two fundamental caveats: first of all, sublimation entails that there are no a priori univocal standards for self-formation. The anti-essentialist self beyond inside-outside dualisms is formed in interaction with and derives the goals and ideals that enable imposing a form to itself from its environment. Since environments can be very different and are subject to change, also the standards for what can be considered "good self-formation" or "enhancement" show copious variations, both diachronic and synchronic. Since our environments are increasingly technological environments and developments in technology are gaining serious momentum, emerging technologies could bring about radical self-transformation. However, radical transformation through technology does not (contra trans- and posthumanists) simply enable us to become "stronger," "smarter," or "healthier," but it can and often will also influence, norm and disrupt the very standards for establishing what is "good self-formation" or "self-enhancement." In other words: new and emerging technologies are not neutral means but co-determine what we consider as "enhancement." Moreover, technology not only influences the immediate goals and ideals that are used to regulate our thoughts, actions and habits but also higher-level goals, ideals and standards that are used to criticize, adjust and validate lower-level goals and ideals. Therefore, establishing universal or

univocal standards for what is considered "good self-formation" or "enhancement" is impossible.

Second, technology has increasingly become the "other within" that we cannot simply externalize and use as a neutral means to form ourselves. Not only do we possess technology but technology also possess us, since it increasingly has, besides language, laws, rules and regulations, become a permanent structure of our very selfhood. Self-formation as sublimation entails that the self is and always remains compromised: technology both enables and constrains self-formation. Technology as "other within" has become both the necessary condition for forming a self and, at the same time, an obstacle that prevents it from reaching the autonomy and singularity that it seeks.

However, these caveats do not render "good self-formation" impossible. In fact, understanding self-formation as sublimation is motivated by the aim to indicate what is "good self-formation" without endorsing essentialist and dualist views of the self that consider the self as an independent and invariable unity, disconnected from its dynamic environment. First of all, it is by virtue of goals and ideals that we can impart a certain form to our inclinations, interactions, and decisions. It is also by virtue of goals and ideals that we can actively incorporate technologies in a more encompassing project that we aspire and in a more coherent narrative that reflects who we want to be.

Second, real critical identification with societal goals and ideals, which could lead to their adjustment or even rejection, is only possible in the light of other, longer-term goals and ideals; these could also be subjected to criticism but only in the light of yet other goals and ideals; and so on. This requirement also applies to technologies: it must be always possible to subject "intrusive technologies" and congealed technological infrastructures to fierce criticism by challenging the goals and ideals embedded in or promoted by them by virtue of other or longer-term goals and ideals. The filter bubble is a good example of how deliberate and critical self-identification is rendered impossible, since, in the words of Eli Pariser, "personalized filters usually have no Zoom Out function, it's easy to lose your bearings, to believe the world is a narrow island when in fact it's an immense, varied continent" (PARISER, 2011, p. 61).

Third, deliberately and critically appropriating technologies, which is a mark of sublimation, is a challenge that cannot be realized only on an individual level but has to be fostered by and embedded in society as such. The possibility of individuals deliberately and critically identifying themselves with certain goals and ideals needs to be secured by an open society that has incorporated certain mechanisms and regulations, such as informed consent, the possibility to opt-out and the acceptance of minority views and life forms. Since the organization and design of societies is ever more delegated to technologies, it is crucial to secure possibilities to deliberately and critically engage with the technologies and technological infrastructure that is ever more shaping not only our interactions with our surroundings but also our sense of self. Critically engaging with that infrastructure requires political and societal measures that make visible the goals and ideals that it endorses or promotes, and enables challenging, adjusting or even dismissing those goals and ideals on the basis of other, or longer-term goals and ideals.

Fourth, good self-formation as sublimation entails the continuous incorporation of and devotion to ever more inclusive ideals. The ultimate ideal as the most inclusive ideal refers to a phase that could be reached after an endless process of "self-criticisms and of heterocriticisms." We see here how criticism, society and ever more inclusive ideals go together: that an ultimate ideal can be "consistently pursued in any and all circumstances" (POTTER, 1997, p. 49) means that it does not encounter any resistance within an endless community of critical minds. The more we devote ourselves to the pursuit of inclusive goals and ideals, the more we will be able to form and cultivate a disposition that is responsive to an infinite (internal and external) community of critical minds, which in its turn will again increase sensitivity to the attractivity of even more inclusive ideals.

With regard to technologies, this aspect of sublimation calls for devotion to an ultimate ideal that fosters the ongoing cultivation of a critical disposition towards technologies and technological environments. This requires, first of all, making visible which values, goals and ideals are embedded in or promoted by the technologies and technological environments in question, which could be done in public (physical and virtual) spaces, debates, discourses, and performances. By making these goals and ideals visible in public, a community of critical minds is invited to evaluate, challenge and adjust them.

The notion of sublimation intends to recognize the limitations and challenges that modern reality poses, as well as the possibilities that it offers. It wants to recognize that self-formation lacks univocal standards and cannot be completely controlled, though without giving up the possibility to impose on ourselves a form that, although necessarily reflecting the imprints of our environment, still can be considered "ours." Moreover, the absence of univocal and definitive standards for establishing what is suitable or good self-formation implies that the ultimate ideal cannot be ascribed a definite, particular content that is derived from a moral theory, since every moral theory presupposes standards that could also be subjected to criticism. This absence is a necessary condition for developing a singular form, which also explains why good self-formation as sublimation ultimately refers to an *esthetic* ideal that is always projected in the future, and hence regulative, tentative and virtual. Its most important working is to secure a "permanent void" that enables individuals to critically engage with and actively appropriate their (increasingly technological) environment in order to form a singular self.

Not only is it important to cultivate a critical disposition towards technology but, conversely, the aim is also to design technologies that foster a critical disposition. These technologies we might call "sublime technologies." Sublime technologies and technological environments not only prompt certain actions and decisions but also foster the cultivation of a critical disposition that enables *feeling* towards which ideals we have to orient ourselves and which particular habits we have to develop in order to give ourselves a singular and socially valued form, a form that does justice to being both a social and an individual being. Art and artists might be able to provide examples and methods that demonstrate or illustrate how a "void" in technologies and technological environments could be incorporated and what sublime technologies would look like.

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