A semiotic theory of self-control

Uma teoria semiótica do autocontrole

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Abstract: The main aim of the following proposal is to show how the emergence of self-controlled habits from emotions can be explained according to Peirce's speculative grammar. As a result, I hope to show, first, a possible application of speculative grammar, about which much is speculated but little is applied; second, to suggest a possible theory of language understood as a controlled form of our feelings in such a way that this allows them to be shared and communicated. In addition, and even more importantly, this would show that the traditional division between the faculty of reason and the emotional faculty is not such, rather it should be said that reason, or better, reasonability arises from and sinks its roots in this faculty and grows from it in a continuum. Accordingly, any education that aims towards self-control should start in an aesthetic education or, if you prefer, in a sentimental one.

Keywords: Emotions. Ethics. Feelings. Self-Control. Speculative Grammar.

Resumo: *A presente proposta tem como seu principal objetivo mostrar como a emergência de hábitos autocontrolados de emoções podem ser explicados segundo a gramática especulativa de Peirce. Como resultado, espero mostrar, uma possível aplicação da gramática especulativa, sobre o qual muito é especulado, mas pouco é aplicado; segundo, sugerir uma possível teoria da linguagem entendida como uma forma controlada de nossos sentimentos de tal modo a permitir que sejam compartilhadas e comunicadas. Além disso, e ainda mais importante, isto mostraria que a divisão tradicional entre a faculdade da razão e a faculdade emocional não é tal, antes deve ser dito que a razão, ou melhor a razoabilidade, surge e afunda suas raízes nessa faculdade e cresce dela em um continuum. Assim, qualquer educação que vise o autocontrole deve começar com uma educação estética ou, se preferir, com uma educação sentimental.*

Palavras-chave: *Autocontrole. Emoções. Ética. Gramática especulativa. Sentimentos.*

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1 Introduction

According to Peirce, self-control arises in order to oppose our temporary urges and selfish emotions, and this, he claimed, "[…] is the only freedom of which man has any reason to be proud" (CP 5.339 n. 1, 1893). Hence, a human being who wishes to exercise self-control should cultivate his or her emotions. The main aim of the following analysis is to show how the emergence of self-controlled habits can be explained through Peirce's speculative grammar, which itself originates in emotions.

It is important to immediately point out that, although Peirce does not have a semiotic theory of self-control or even emotions, in 1981, David Savan proposed a semiotic theory of emotions, and it is Savan's interpretive framework that will be used as the backdrop of the approach that follows. In addition, even though some discussion has been devoted to Savan's theory of emotions in scholarly literature, a more recent study by Robert J. Beeson, *Peirce on the Passions: The Role of Instinct, Emotion, and Sentiment in Inquiry and Passion* of 2008,[1] acknowledges the relevance and provocative power of Savan's semiotic theory of emotions. Therefore, beyond criticizing Savan's theory of self-control, the interest of the present study is to explore the richness of his idea and develop it, or "make it grow" in the direction of a semiotic theory of self-control, which I hope, the reader will consider powerful and provocative.

Thus, David Savan's semiotic theory of emotions provides a good starting point to answer the question of how it is possible for emotions to be influenced by reason. Let us remember, first, that many scholars have claimed that there is a gap between practical and logical matters in Peirce's philosophy.[2] Now, if this were true, Peirce could not provide a cognitivist theory of ethics, and more importantly for our present subject, this would mean that emotions would have nothing to do with reasoning or, in other words, that emotions could not be influenced by reason and self-control could not take place. Accordingly, one of the virtues of proposing a semiotic theory of emotions and self-control is to show that, insofar as emotions are engaged in semiotic processes, they are susceptible of being influenced by reason. Thus, semiotic processes of emotions should be able to produce self-controlled sentiments.

In this light, I also think that it is necessary to rework the views of those who claim that perception and emotions are not actually under our control. It is true that feelings and percepts as such cannot be controlled (See EP 2:412-413). However, we

1 I agree with the general traits of Beeson's explanation of Savan's theory. Both of us, Beeson and I, yet disagree with Savan's explanation of Peirce's Interpretants. However, while Beeson follows Brandon Lalor's suggestion that emotional, energetical, and logical interpretants refer to the special case in which the human process of semiosis takes place, and immediate, dynamic and final interpretants are understood as the process of semiosis that pervades the cosmos and does not require a brain in order to take place; I mainly follow Liszka (1996). According to him, cosmic and physiological processes are basically continuous. And, as I claim elsewhere, the distinction between these aspects depend upon different attempts made by Peirce to name and differentiate the interpretants. Beeson, however, does not present a semiotic theory of emotions and self-control applying speculative grammar, but rather provides a more general account.

2 See GOUDGE, 1969; STUHR, 1994; KROIS, 1994; HOOKWAY, 2002; and MISAK, 2002.

can learn to see and be moved in some ways, and it is for this reason that actions are the expression of our habits. Otherwise, it would make no sense to claim, as Peirce does, that aesthetics is a normative science for ethics, and our possibilities of learning to see and create beauty in the cosmos through our self-controlled actions would be non-existent. In this sense, an important aspect of Savan's theory that I want to underscore is that it allows us not only to accept self-control as a real kind of agency, but it also allows us to provide a more detailed account of how emotional self-control can be possible, as well as to show that self-control actually starts from our emotions and instincts. In what follows, I will offer a summary of Savan's semiotic theory of emotions and will try to fill in some lacunae left open by his framework. I hope that others will also fill in remaining gaps and make further developments in this theoretical frontier.

Peirce explained semeiotics as the study of signs, and he described a sign as "[…] any object of thought which excites any kind of mental action, whether voluntary or not, concerning something otherwise recognized" (MS 849:4-5, 1911). Before going into a more detailed discussion, some general aspects of Peirce's semeiotics should be understood. Peirce's understanding of language and meaning is not confined to human beings and human consciousness. He actually believed that animals and the universe in general participate in semeiotic processes,—the movement of a sunflower toward the sun, for example, is an instance of a semiotic process. What is distinctive among human beings is our capacity to control and correct semeiotic processes. That is why reasoning or self-controlled thought represents only a part of semeiotics, which is properly studied under a subdivision that Peirce called critical logic.

Furthermore, based on Peirce's doctrine of synechism, a continuity between uncontrolled thought and reasoning, or self-controlled thought, should be granted, a continuity which is also expressed in the continuity between animals and human beings and, more specifically, by our capacity to communicate with other species. The present analysis will attempt to show how this transition takes place through semeiotic processes. From a more general perspective, it is undeniable that even though Peirce devoted most of his life to the study of logic, of which semeiotics is one of its great products, semeiotics, as such, is a broader field about which Peirce was only able to elucidate general features.

Nonetheless, it is my view that the best way to improve our knowledge of semeiotics is to follow the good pragmaticist advice of employing it or putting it into use. In this way, we come to experience the meaning of signs and not merely to speculate concerning their use. Peirce himself recommended this method:

> The principles of Phenomenology enable us to describe, in a distant way, what the divisions of triadic relations must be. But until we have met with the different kinds *a posteriori*, and have in that way been led to recognize their importance, the *a priori* descriptions mean little;—not nothing at all, but little (EP 2.289).

This proposal of a semeiotics of self-control is then part of the effort of putting semeiotics into use.

2 General aspects of the semiotic process

Before going into a more detailed discussion, some general aspects of Peirce's semiotics should be recognized. Peirce considered signs to be mediums for communication and, as mediums, signs are essentially in a triadic relation (See EP 2:544 n. 22, 1906) between a sign-representamen, an object and an interpretant.

This triadic process is depicted as follows: the interpretant is determined by the sign, which, in turn, is determined by the object. Therefore, the interpretant is determined mediately by the object through the sign, so that a sign is connected to another sign and so on indefinitely.

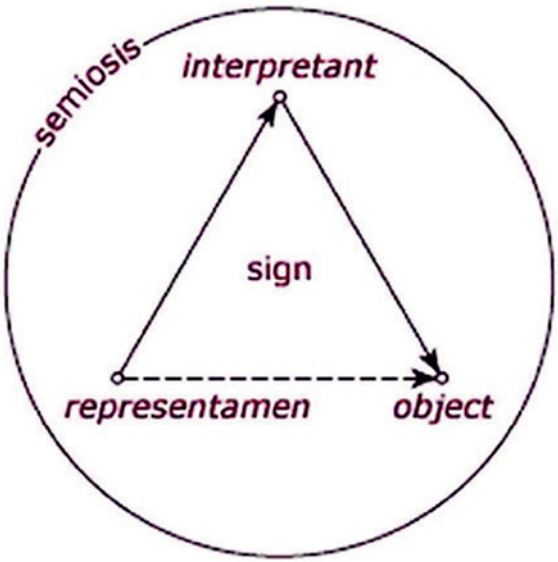

Figure 1. Peirce's semiotic triangle[3]

2.1 Types of signs and their functions

In 1903, Peirce proposed his most refined categorization of ten types of signs, since it not only elaborates on the relationship of the signs with their objects, which is basically the relationship elucidated in traditional logic, but also considers the sign in relation to the different categories of semiosis established in the figure above. This allowed him to identify at least ten types of signs with which we can explain emotions, although he intimated that there could be more. For the present, I will simply recount them, since there is insufficient space in the present work to address them in detail. However, in the end, I will return to an example in order to illustrate how self-control could be explained using speculative grammar.

3 Source: LE CHENG; MINGYU GONG, and JIAN LI, 2017, p. 141. Based on ECO, 1976, p. 59.

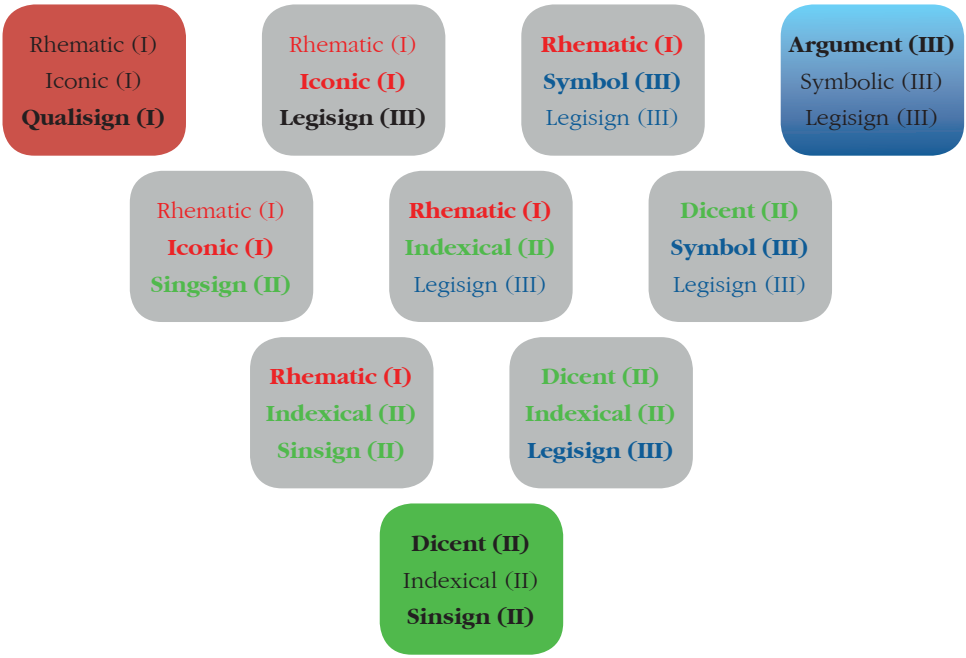

Figure 2. The ten types of signs[4]

2.2 The signs and its relations

Let us remember that each of the Peircean categories rules a different kind of universe, as shown in table 1. Thus, although firstness, in the beginning, was related by Peirce with quality, as is the case of the categories in general, it more prominently features in the universe of possibilities. Accordingly, Peirce claimed that signs belonging to this universe are signs of qualitative possibility, which represent a kind of possible object (See EP 2:92, 1901).

On the other hand, secondness represents the universe of actual facts, signs of actual existences. Thirdness represents the universe of laws and habits. As a result, signs belonging to each one of these universes will display certain particular characteristics as well. In the case of qualisigns, which belong to firstness, they cannot be signs by themselves; that is, they cannot be involved in a semeiotic process between sign, object, and interpretant, until they are embodied. Thus, red cannot signify anything unless it is embodied by an object, such as blood (See EP 2:291, 1903). In a similar manner, symbols cannot signify but through their replicas in actual facts or sinsigns. For example, the idea of justice can only signify through a replica such as the case of a person who gets her money back from the person who robbed her and the consequent punishment of the culprit.

4 *Source:* Juliana Acosta and Jorge Alejandro Flórez, based on the *Nomenclature and Division of Triadic Relations*, EP 2:296, 1903.

Relation	Firstness: Quality and Possibility	Secondness: Actuality	Thirdness: General Law
Nature of the sign	Qualisign	Sinsign	Legisign
Relation of the sign to its **object**	Icon	Index	Symbol
Relation of the sign according to how the **interpretant** represents it	Rheme	Dicisign	Argument

Table 1. The sign and its relations[5]

Moreover, Peirce considered symbols privileged among signs. This is so, firstly, because "[…] neither a pure icon nor a pure index can assert anything" (EP 2:307, 1904); and secondly because symbols "[…] have a great power of which the degenerate signs are quite destitute. They alone express laws. Nor are they limited to this theoretical use. They serve to bring about reasonableness and law." (EP 2:308, 1904). Finally, as a direct outcome of the second feature of the privileged place of symbols, "[e]very sufficiently complete symbol is a final cause of, and 'influences,' real events" (EP 2:317, 1904). But, now that we have covered this basic scheme, we are in a position to ask: what type of sign is an emotion?

3 What type of sign is an emotion?

According to Savan, the semiotic process of emotions occurs, as any other semiotic process, between a representamen, an object, and an interpretant (See Figure 3). The representamen is an emotion, which is a legisign, the objects being their replicas or iconic sinsigns, and their interpretants are divided into immediate, dynamic, and final types (See 1981, p. 322). Or as I claim, following Liszka (1996) interpretants can be emotional, energetic and logical, which are synonyms. Emotions are symbols, since they are conventional or habitual ways of expressing feelings. In the same way, as Savan rightly puts it, feelings "[…] are the non-cognitive and non-representational material qualities of the emotions" (1981, p. 323). Feelings are firstnesses, and, therefore, present themselves as a non-reflective kind of stimulus. Next, let me clarify what it means to be a legisign, as Savan classifies emotions.

5 *Source:* Author's. Based on "Nomenclature and Divisions of Triadic Relations, as Far as They Are Determined."

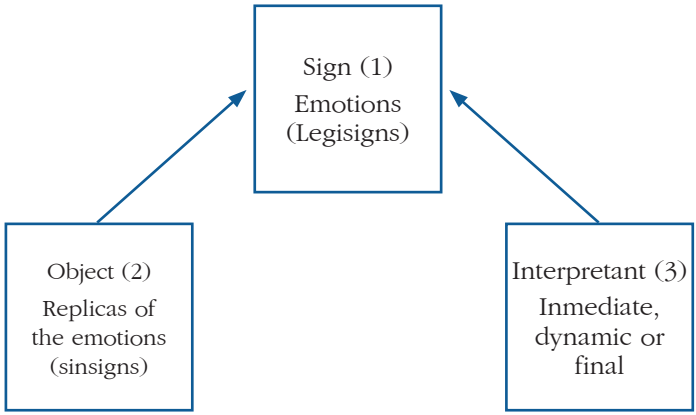

Figure 3. Semiotic process of emotions[6]

In *Some Consequences of Four Incapacities* (1868), Peirce stated that sensations and emotions are the material quality of thought. However, he also established a difference between them in claiming that while sensation "is not a thought" and "produces no great commotion in the bodily organism" (EP 1:44, 1868); emotions do relate to thoughts and bodily motions. Thus, feelings and sensations are closer to each other, phenomenologically speaking, than sensations and emotions. This is the case since an emotion "[…] is always a simple predicate substituted by an operation of the mind for a highly complicated predicate" (EP 1:44, 1868), that, according to Savan, fulfills the function of a hypothesis (See 1981, p. 325). As a result, emotions are the products of a semeiotic process, while sensations and feelings are enablers that may or may not rise to the status of an emotion. Initially, feelings and sensations are only indicative of our capacity to be affected; but on the other hand, emotions, for Peirce, are feelings which are also representations (See EP 1:43, 1868). However, actions produced by emotions do not themselves manifest self-control. They spring from a direct impulse and are based mainly on instinctive habits (See EP 1:45, 1868).

As already pointed out, Savan claimed that emotions are legisings, in other words, emotions are signs of general laws that signify through their replicas or sinsigns (See also CP 2.246, 1903). At this point, we have to address the last element in the triadic relation of a semeiosis, the interpretants, which are of the utmost

6 *Source:* Author's. Based on my own reading of semeiotics. Different sources are implied. Sinsigns are mentioned here because the objects of the semiotic process of emotions, understood as legisigns, work as their replicas. Thus, the presence of a rattlesnake is a sinsign in the semiotic process of an emotion of fear. Accordingly, fear works as a hypothesis or law that tags the particular event as one of its replicas or sinsigns. Qualisigns, of course, are embedded in the process, since upper signs imply the lower ones; for instance, the rattle sound as a qualisign of the presence of the snake is embedded in the semiotic process. However, in this particular semiotic process they are not as relevant or, at least, there is no need to highlight their specific function.

importance here since they represent the "[…] effect upon a person determined by an object and its sign" (EP 2:478, 1908). It is on the basis of their effects that self-control can take place. In this sense, it is important to note that self-control will consist of an interpretant that returns to itself as a sign, or as Beeson refers to it, as an exercise of hypostatic abstraction.[7]

Peirce maintains that the emotional, or the immediate interpretant, has a sense or feeling of comprehending the meaning of the sign, in his words, "[i]f it, [the interpretant,] includes more than mere feeling, it must evoke some kind of effort. It may include something besides, which, for the present, may be vaguely called 'thought'" (EP 2:409, 1907). In Savan's words, the emotional or immediate interpretant creates hypothetical labels to identify an emotional state such as fear, or joy, (1981, p. 325). The energetic, or dynamic interpretant, is according to Savan's description, an affect. Affects are, then, the direct or actual effect that an emotional sign has upon an interpretant, such as when we react with rage in the face of a violent episode. Finally, we have the logical or final interpretant. Peirce deemed habits to be the essence of the logical interpretant (See EP 2:412, 1907). Furthermore, Peirce maintained that

> […] the logical interpretant must be in a relatively future tense, [thus] not all signs have logical interpretants, but only intellectual concepts and the like; and these are all either general or intimately connected. This shows that the species of future tense of the final interpretant is that of the conditional mood, the 'would be' (EP 2:410, 1907).

Accordingly, self-control greatly depends on the possibility of emotions having or growing into a logical interpretant, provided that it is only when we can reason about emotions, and not merely appropriate their meaning, that self-control can take place.

Savan (1981) also claimed in this vein that three types of emotions should be considered; namely natural instincts, which are related to our instincts of feeding and breeding; moral emotions, which are learned through social experience and vary according to each culture and community; and sentiments, which are logical systems of emotions. Savan portrayed sentiments as "[e]nduring systems of emotions, attached either to a person, an institution, or, in Peirce's case, a method [the scientific method of fixing beliefs]. Love is the prime example of a sentiment" (1981, p. 331). But love is not the only self-controlled or rational sentiment. Savan rightly maintained that faith, hope, and charity—which in my point of view emerge from love—, are the Peircean sentiments *par excellence*, since these are indispensable for good reasoning (See EP 1:150, 1878).

Now we return to the development of the interpretants. From the classification above, one can see that, at least at the beginning, immediate and

7 Based on Short's Hypostatic Abstraction in Self-Consciousness, Beeson explains that through hypostatic abstraction "[…] we seem to create entia rationis that are, nevertheless, sometimes real, furnishes us with the means of turning predicates from being signs that we think or think through, into being subjects thought of" (2008, p. 175).

dynamic interpretants will closely correspond to and depend upon our natural and moral emotions. Moreover, Savan explained, "[…] the final interpretant of moral emotions depends upon the final interpretant of the natural emotions" (1981, p. 331). Following the same rationale, the final interpretant of sentiments should also depend on the final interpretant of natural and moral emotions. But this is true, as I see it, only to some extent. If the purpose of sentiments is to build logical habits from emotions, the final or logical interpretant of our natural instincts and moral emotions should depend on the final interpretant of sentiments. In other words, while natural instincts and moral emotions would function as the matter of the final interpretant, the logical interpretant should be able to come back to them in order to connect them with our net of logical sentiments and provide them with a new logical form. Therefore, if a final interpretant is properly established, which in my estimation and also Peirce's may not be the case, one should expect that emotions can be progressively ruled by logical sentiments and self-controlled habits over time.

Peirce also claimed that, even though interpretants develop from each other—that is, the dynamic interpretant evolves from the immediate interpretant and the final interpretant evolves from the immediate and the dynamic one—, the logical or final interpretant does not necessarily emerge from every semeiotic process. "The occasion may either be too early or too late" (EP 2:414, 1907). For an occasion that is too early, we can think, for instance, of the reaction of someone who suddenly feels a cold breeze coming from the window and quickly tries to reach the window in order to close it; in this case, the energetic interpretant has taken place and no need has arisen for a further development of a logical interpretant. In the second case, when the occasion is too late, Peirce is talking about habits already learned that work like instincts, or, as Aristotle rightly called them, like a "second nature."

Peirce is correct in this appreciation, although I would add that not every person develops a logical interpretant for the same reason that not everybody is willing to follow the scientific method of the fixation of beliefs, since most people are usually very comfortable in letting others think for them. And while reasoning is almost like an instinct for human beings, to reach for the truth, or truths, is a genuine act of free will.

Finally, following the semiotic theory that I propose, I will demonstrate how different interpretants can develop in order to achieve a logical interpretant and, with this, how self-control can take place through the analysis of very emotional pictures. The pictures that I will use to demonstrate this are those of Aylan Kurdi, the three-year old child washed out by the ocean in Bodrum, Turkey and that of Valeria Martínez with his father, Oscar Martínez, at the shore of the Río Bravo or Rio Grande.

Figure 4. Valeria and Oscar Martínez at the Río Grande/Bravo's Shore and Aylan Kurdi at the shores of Bodrum.[8]

In the case of the pictures of the death of migrant children, that is, Aylan Kurdi and Valeria Martínez, the sign may appeal, first, to its emotional interpretant *suggesting* a feeling of sympathy or sadness, for example. By looking at the images of the children, one can feel compassion for their deaths. Secondly, as an imperative, the meaning of the picture can grow into rage, an emotion that increases our heart rate and compels us somehow. Finally, as an indicative, the episode can bring about indignation. In this way, from my primary identification with the episode, the meaning of the picture grows into a moral emotion, learned by vital or cultural experiences, such as indignation. So far, no real reasoning has taken place. But once the final or logical interpretant enters into the picture, different grades of self-control start to develop. A sign can appeal to its final interpretant in three ways: as a rhema—also sometimes called a term—; as a dicisign—also sometimes called a proposition—; and as an argument, or a sign of a law. Savan argued that instinctive natural emotions identify objects that provide either security or frustration and are mostly related to our instincts of feeding and breeding, while the final interpretant is a gratific rheme. Moral emotions, on the other hand, are learned through social experience and their final interpretants are practical dicisigns. Finally, we have logical sentiments, whose final interpretant, according to Savan, is a logical pragmatistic sign (See table 2).

8 Source: Editor, Datanoticias, June 26, 2019. https://www.datanoticias.com/2019/06/26/aylan-y-valeria-imagenes-de-la-migracion/. This is an overlap of two photos showing two sides of the migration crisis in North America and Europe. The first picture was taken allegedly either by Abraham Pineda-Jácome, Julia Le Duc or Rossy Morales on June 23, 2019, and the second one by Nilüfer Demir on September 2, 2015.

Emotions (Legisigns)	Final Interpretant
Natural Instincts of breeding and feeding	Gratific/Rhemes
Moral Emotions learnt by social experience	Practical/Dicisigns
Sentiments systems of logical emotions	Logical/Pragmatistic signs

Table 2. Final interpretants of emotions according to Savan[9]

However, I assume that "second natures," or habits that have been already adopted and work without the need of conscious effort—like the billiard player's reflexes—work like instincts, and, therefore, can be rhemes as well. In the same way, the three kinds of emotions can be dicisigns and logical pragmatistic signs or arguments. What varies among them, in my view, is the degree of self-control and consciousness with which we make use of them. Thus, indignation, which is a moral affect, learned and acquired through cultural experience, can be treated as a concept or rhema, a possible sign of a possible replica, in this case catalyzed by my looking at the pictures of the children. I can, however, start mediating with my actual feeling of indignation and develop a dicisign or proposition of the event. I can begin by identifying my indignation as a right replica of the idea of indignation, and my habits attached to such a feeling. My thinking, for instance, that this indignation is aroused by the idea of these children dying while trying to escape from circumstances of war, is an instance of this kind of mediation. It is clear to me that this case is an expression of something wrong having occurred, and even though a solution to the wrong may not be directly in my hands, I can start trying to abduce and hypothesize about possible solutions and about who should act and take some responsibility for the wrong.

I can make of this experience one instance among so many cases of refugees, try to see some inductive connections among the cases, and try to deduce what hypothesis may best improve these people's lives. As a result, I will reach some kind of opinion or belief regarding the situation of these refugees, with the hope that those institutions that really have the means to assist them will go through similar processes of inquiry. Here, I would have succeeded in turning this episode into a practical dicisign, for I am attaching it to logical sentiments or a system of rational emotions. Thus, the case of these children will not be merely a replica of my personal indignation, but will become a sign that is connected with a broader and more complex situation, the situation of war refugees, and I will be able to approach it from the logical pragmatistic sentiments of hope, charity, and faith required for good reasoning.

4 Conclusion

In the same way as a painter can express him or herself better to the extent that he or she has a better command of color theory and the different shades of color, from this analysis, I hope it will be possible to clearly understand the way in which we

9 Source: Author's. Based on Savan's *Peirce's semiotic theory of emotion* (1981).

actually create and could create meaning through signs by virtue of our knowledge of the categorization of signs. In addition, this analysis should shed light on how a theory of language, understood as a controlled form of our feelings, could be grounded, in also showing how can we share and communicate these feelings. Finally, the framework I have laid out here reveals that the traditionally strict distinction between the faculty of reason and the emotional faculty is not sound. Instead, reason should be understood as arising from and sinking its roots in emotions, and both are continuous, in accordance with the Peircean idea that synechism is "[…] the master key that opens the arcana of philosophy" (CP 1.163). Unsurprisingly, the first interpretant in every semiotic process is the emotional interpretant (CP 5.475), and it is for this reason that any education that aims at self-control should start with an aesthetic education or, if you prefer, with a sentimental one.[10]

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10 For a detailed account of the idea of an Aesthetic Education in Peirce see ACOSTA, 2018.

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