# BOOK REVIEW

## *Sign System Studies* (2015), Special issue: *Peirce's Theory of Signs*, vol. 43, no. 4, pp. 369-371, Guest editor Ahti-Veikko Pietarinen, University of Tartu. ISSN 1406-4243 (print), 1736-7409 (online).

This special issue of *Sign System Studies* is a most welcome appearance in the landscape of pragmatist and semiotic studies, where it stands out as an example of collaborative and dialogical scholarship: five of the thirteen contributing authors also comment on each other's papers, and all papers are commented upon by the editor **Ahti-Veikko Pietarinen** in a final essay. Pietarinen's introduction to the volume (pp. 372–398) can be recommended as a historically aware, textually grounded perspective on Peirce's theory of signs. Pietarinen does not hesitate to provide some strong interpretative keys, which stem from a systematic reconstruction of Peirce's thought helped by contemporary game theory, philosophy of language, and communication theory. Such reading keys are further applied in Pietarinen's long comment on all contributions (pp. 616–650). While they certainly help provide a coherent interpretation, they may on occasion reduce the multi-layered import of Peirce's logic and semiotic by flattening it down to an existing schema of strategy-oriented players. This outcome depends on the chosen direction of the explanation: if game theory is introduced to elucidate pragmatic and semiotic processes and not the other way around, game theory is assumed as self-explanatory. However, in the closing commentary to the contributions, Pietarinen gives a pragmatist explanation of "goal-directed strategies," which are defined as "general tendencies to act in certain ways in certain kinds of circumstances" (p. 618). It becomes clear that game theory can be a model of (at least some aspects of) pragmatist reasoning but pragmatism is not a model of game theory.

In this review, my aim is not to provide a second commentary on the contributions, but rather to highlight some interpretative tensions which give a taste of the ongoing discussion on signs. I have grouped the essays thematically in four broad categories: The first paragraph deals with objects of reference, the second paragraph with rhetoric, the third paragraph with the emotional effects of signs, and the fourth, and last, paragraph is dedicated to all remaining essays.

## Reference

Reference is a major concern for theories of signs. Two sides of this problem are explored in the present issue; one is how can our words refer to things in the world (**Nathan Houser**, **Helmut Pape**), the other is how can we communicate the thing we are referring to to another mind (**Francesco Bellucci**). In Houser's account of the relation among indexicality, perception and external world (an essay which first appeared in 1995 and is reprinted in this issue), indices are the "bridges" connecting "perception and thought…to the external world" (p. 565). Such indices, however, are in turn dependent for their effectiveness on a shared *experience* (CP 3.419, quoted on p. 573), i.e. a shared "being in the world" (as Houser's title provocatively suggests). Logical, semantical, and perceptual aspects of such a shared world can be formally represented, according to Houser (pp. 573–574), by Peirce's system of Existential Graphs. This, however, does not free ourselves from the need for experience: "The fact is, graphs cannot make actual contact with the world any more easily than ordinary sentences can; […] they do not make that connection for us—they call on us to rise up, to move our bodies, to use our powers of observation to find the place in the world they are pointing to" (p. 573).

It would seem that experience plays a fundamental role in the possibility to share reference as well. **Francesco Bellucci**, in his paper on the immediate object of a sign (i.e., that part of a sign that allows identity of reference), acknowledges the fundamental role in reference of "a well understood common experience" (p. 411), to the point of saying that "anything that belongs or has any role in the determination of the reference of a sign, is part of its immediate object" (p. 411). Despite the broad view endorsed here, by the end of the paper Bellucci's argument narrows down to the idea that (1) the immediate object of the sign is a quantifier and (2) therefore, "only propositions and propositional-like sings have immediate objects" (pp. 411, 422).

Such a move is possible because of inner tensions in Peirce's account of the immediate object.

In 1909, in a letter to William James, Peirce imagines he is asked by his wife Juliet about the weather: "I reply, let us suppose, "It is a stormy day." Here is another sign. Its Immediate Object is the notion of the present weather so far as this is common to her mind and mine – not the character of it, but the identity of it." (CP 8.314)

Peirce explicitly distinguishes the *immediate object* of a sign—i.e., that part of a sign that allows identity of reference—from the *character* of the object referred to; the immediate object in this context is only the *identity* of reference to a particular sign.

Bellucci has a firm textual basis for his argument that the immediate object only concerns the identity of a notion, not the full notion itself; it is not the idea of stormy weather that the immediate object conveys—that is what the interpretant conveys—rather it is the possibility that two minds refer to it. Sure enough, the quantifier helps in conveying a certain description because it already points Juliet towards the right kind of object. However, it is difficult to see that quantity is the only element for establishing identity of reference in a common universe of discourse. No matter how extensively Juliet may have shared experiences with Charles, it seems hard that if she asks her husband about the weather, she gets the same reference as Charles simply because "it is a stormy day" is a singular proposition, equivalent to "this day is stormy." While the quantifier certainly does a fundamental work in helping us to pick the right type of object form the universe of discourse, it seems to fail to convey the full idea of identity of reference.

For this reason, I would rather stick to Bellucci's original, broader claim that "Anything that belongs or has any role in the determination of the reference of a sign, is part of its immediate object" (p. 411). It is possible that the 1909 example actually marks a shift in how immediate objects are supposed to work: from signs that convey both quantification and a "representation" of the object referred to, to parts of signs which simply individuate an object by quantifying upon it.

**Helmut Pape**, in his contribution on the dynamical object of a sign, criticises such a propositional-oriented interpretation of the immediate object and claims that both the immediate and the dynamical object, i.e. the real thing that our sign wants to convey, have an ontological side. Moreover, the interpretation of objects of signs works inferentially and causally. According to Pape, such a structure should mediate the "tension" between the reality-dependency of signs which accounts for their reliability and the mind-dependency of signs which accounts for our understanding of reality. I do not see how this should be a problem for a pragmatist attitude, while Pape's attempt at reading the immediate object ontologically (p. 424) has the problem of creating a conflict between the changing nature of the "dynamic" reality and the static structure of an immediate object. More on parallels between semiotic categories and ontological ones

can be found in the contribution of **Juuso-Ville Gustafsson**, 'Triadism and processuality' (pp. 438–445), while **Frederik Stjernfelt** provides a very short and convincing argument for why the process of reference in Peirce's semiotic does not end up lost in the loops of "evil infinites" but always finds its way back to earth ('Blocking evil infinites: a note on a note on a Peircean strategy', pp. 518–522). **Stjernfelt** thereby illustrates the key difference between Peirce's philosophy and twentieth-century structuralism: Peirce's system of reference has as ultimate outcome an action or a disposition to act.

## Rhetoric

In Peirce's system of thought, logic is divided according to its objects in (1) speculative grammar, (2) critics, and (3) speculative rhetoric (later methodeutic). **Mats Bergman** provides here an interpretation of the role and fortune of speculative rhetoric in Peirce's thought, based on the first philological reconstruction of Peirce's writings from 1893–1898. As **Bergman** reminds us, a first, early reference to rhetoric appears in the essay 'On a New List of Categories' (1867), where Peirce defines the domain of rhetoric as "the formal conditions of the force of symbols, or their power of appealing to a mind, that is, of their reference in general to interpretants" (W2: 57). Such conditions include notational adjustments in branches such as mathematics and geometry (pp. 465–466); their aim is to highlight the conditions of reasoning *in its making*, i.e. as one thought influences the next one. Thus speculative rhetoric is also the study of scientific thought in as far as scientific representations are a product of it. In MS 787, quoted by Bergman (p. 466), Peirce writes: "Science is a living process and not a fixed result. Consequently, it is not sufficient to find the general conditions of the truth of a representation. It is necessary further to study the laws of the development of scientific representation. I have named this study, rather fancifully, *speculative rhetoric*...". While this may seem a logical version of the psychological account of reasoning by association, it is first and foremost a plan for broadening the concept of logic itself. This broadened logic does not stop at verification but rather aims to account for the general conditions of production and enforcement of scientific representations. In **Bergman**'s view, Peirce's conception of such a "higher branch of logic" is inspired by Hegel's objective logic; or even better, "the envisaged reformation of philosophical rhetoric *as* objective logic […] best explains Peirce's claim that the third branch would be the highest division of logic" (p. 473). Abandoning such high hopes

for rhetoric, Peirce will later drop the label "speculative rhetoric" to focus on a logic of scientific method: the so-called methodeutic.

## Emotions

Proper effects produced by a sign on a mind are called by Peirce "interpretants" of the sign. Interpretants can be of different kind; in MS 318 (1907)—partially published in the *Collected Papers* (CP) and partially in the *Essential Peirce 2* (EP2)—Peirce divides the interpretants into "emotional," "energetic," "logical" (EP2, 409); the logical interpretant may be "ultimate" (MS 318, 34) or "final" (EP2, 418) when its effect is a *habit-change.* The two contributions in this volume explicitly devoted to the interpretants both focus on emotional interpretants: **Jean-Marie Chevalier** presents 'The role of emotional interpretants in Peirce's theory of belief and doubt' and **Henrik Rydenfelt** 'Emotional interpretants and ethical inquiry.' **Chevalier** examines Peirce's remarks on the relation between emotions and beliefs, sketches a possible theory of their interaction and defends it from the obvious objection that a good epistemic theory should not be a hedonistic epistemology which makes well-being the measure for truth. While Chevalier acknowledges Peirce's distinction between the "emotional interpretant" and emotions themselves (p. 487), the two final paragraphs on belief seem to blur such a carefully drawn line. The distinction is crucial, I believe, to prevent precisely the kind of "epistemic emotivism" that Chevalier rejects while maintaining a role for the emotional interpretant in habit-change. Such distinction, furthermore, may enable us to dispose—at least for the sake of this argument—of Short's (2007) problematic thesis that the emotional, energetic and logical trichotomy of interpretants is really distinct from the "immediate," "dynamic," and "final" trichotomy (Letter to William James, EP2, 496-7). In MS 318, 32-33 (also CP 5.475), quoted by Chevalier (p. 487), we read: "The first proper significate effect of a sign is a feeling produced by it. There is almost always a feeling which we come to interpret as evidence that we comprehend the proper effect of the sign [...]. This "emotional interpretant," as I call it, may amount to much more than that feeling of recognition; and in some cases, it is the only proper significate effect that the sign produces." This "feeling of understanding," or "minimal feeling of comprehension" (p. 487) is the very first effect of a sign upon a mind; it says to the mind, You can understand me, You can have access to what I mean—without thereby providing any meaning nor any justification for its claim. It is the possibility of such a meaning and justification; as Gava (2014,

Chapter 3) stresses, it represents the dimension of *potentiality*. What Peirce says about the *immediate* interpretant further emphasizes its *being-for-a-mind*—a status entailing both accessibility and potentiality: "The first was such Familiarity as gave a person familiarity with a sign and readiness in using it or interpreting it. In his consciousness he seemed to be quite *at home* with the sign" (EP2, 496-7; emphasis of the text). As soon as a distinctive emotion is developed—i.e., an emotion with a distinctive quality, such as tranquillity or passion—some energy, some reaction is involved, and the mind is already dwelling with the "energetic" effect of the sign. However, what is crucial is that the energetic interpretant is built upon this initial feeling of intelligibility: "If a sign produces any further proper significate effect, it will do so through the mediation of the emotional interpretant" (CP 5.475). Now, there is one further step that must be taken to understand how the emotional interpretant so defined can have a role in inquiry, particularly in the belief-doubt dialectic made famous by the *Illustrations* series of 1877–1878. The sense of intelligibility and of familiarity that a sign first produces upon a mind is also what works—for the 1907 Peirce—in connecting and disconnecting thoughts. Such task was performed by *attention* in the early Peirce, very likely in the period of the *Illustrations*, too. In 1907, however, Peirce writes that, if we admit that habits can come with "grades of strength, varying from complete dissociation to inseparable association, these grades are mixtures of promptitude of action, easy excitability and other ingredients" (MS 318, 35). And he goes on explaining: "The habit-change often consists in raising or lowering the strength of a habit." Namely, habit-change—a.k.a. the "final interpretant" of a sign—not only makes use but *is constituted of* the varying degree of the feeling of familiarity regarding a specific aspect of the world and our attitude towards it. So, if Chevalier wants to interpret belief and doubt in light of the later theory of the emotional interpretant, he could probably do so without seeking a contrast between "feeling and emotion" (p. 493), i.e. emotional and energetic interpretant, thereby escaping all possible charge of "epistemic emotivism."

**Rydenfelt** has a similar problem to the one of Chevalier; he too wants the emotional interpretant to play a role in inquiry—this time ethical inquiry—but without the risk of ethical emotivism. Rydenfelt is much more open to the possibility of ethics arising from sensations of pleasure and disgust than Chevalier is towards the thesis that inquiry is guided by feelings; in this, Rydenfelt distinguishes between a "descriptive" and "normative" accounts of ethical judgements, maintaining that, while moral judgements are neither "explained by emotions" nor are "justified by emotions," they can, nonetheless,

be "sparked" by emotions (p. 511). Emotions would therefore have the role of potential triggers of moral judgements among other things (as, for instance, "what we have learned from others"). Again, emotions (energetic interpretants) are distinguished from emotional interpretants (pp. 506–507), but the border between the two is blurred as in the example of indignation (a clear instance of energetic, or dynamic, interpretant) triggering a moral judgement (p. 509): "Witnessing some horrid action quite spontaneously leads to the judgement that what occurred was wrong, conveyed by an emotional interpretant (a feeling of indignation or the like)." In this case, according to Rydenfelt, the feeling of indignation would serve as an emotional interpretant by triggering the purpose of avoiding the horrid action in the future. Provided we accept that indignation is a possible emotional interpretant, Rydenfelt's question on "whether the emotional interpretants themselves can serve an interpretative purpose" (p. 506) would be answered in the affirmative. Even if this is not granted, however, Rydenfelt makes a very sensible point in stressing the role of purpose in habit-changing. Purpose is obviously of primary importance in ethical theory. However, the connection between emotional interpretants and purposes remains dim unless a third element is brought into the picture: the faculty of imagination. In MS 318, 38–39, Peirce writes: "no new association, no entirely new association, can be created by involuntary experiences." Peirce argues for this with examples involving learning motor skills: "I am persuaded that nothing like a conception can be acquired by muscular practice alone. When we seem to do that, it is not the muscular action but *the accompanying inward effort, the acts of imagination*, that produce the habit" (emphasis added). It is interesting to note how the faculty of imagination acts according to the same power—inward effort—that constitutes the emotional reaction, the full-fledged quality of feeling explored in the energetic interpretant. Differently from the action of a sign over a mind, however, imagination affects the inner world *from the inside*; it is a faculty of the mind (i.e., of reason), not the effect of a sign acting upon the mind from the outside. Indeed it would be interesting to go on exploring the role of imagination in habit-change and specifically in ethical judgements.

# Semiotics and ontology; iconicity and mental imagery

Along the contributions of Pape and Gustafsson named above, the paper of **Marc Champagne** 'A less simplistic metaphysics: Peirce's layered theory of meaning as a layered theory of being' can be ascribed to the 'semiotics and ontology' category. **Tyler James Bennett**'s 'The semiotic life cycle and *The Symbolic Species*' stands on its own and elaborates on Deacon's work in philosophy of biology and semiotic.

For those concerned with iconicity it may be worth to have a look at **Amirouche Moktefi**'s and at **Benoit Gaultier**'s contributions. Moktefi's paper is on Euler's circle—"a symbol or an icon?"—and explores the differences between symbolic and iconic notations as well as the possible effect of such differences in notation on reasoning. It aims at being a contribution in the philosophy of notation. Benoit Gaultier's paper is titled 'Some perplexities about Peirce's skeleton ideas'. Those "skeleton ideas," besides being an *apex* in Peirce's work, have a certain interest in that their iconic feature should help in the association ideas.

Lastly, **Jelena Issajeva** 'Sign theory at work: The mental-imagery debate revisited' provides and interesting application of pragmatist tools and attitude to the contemporary debate on mental imagery. Against the current paradigm of mental images as representations, Issajeva argues that it is more productive to analyse mental images according to their *functions*; as such, they appear as an articulated system that can be approached via Peirce's notion of sign.

I hope to have offered a comprehensive overlook on the contributions of this volume as well as why everyone interested in pragmatism, Peirce, semiotics, philosophy of notation, rhetoric and the ethical side of inquiry should look into it. This collection of essays dwells on classical philosophical problems such as reference and meaning from a not-so-classical perspective and suggests paths for further inquiry. Most importantly, however, it adopts a dialogical and collaborative model making the resulting philosophical discussion a true conversation and not a set of monologues.

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