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**THE USE AND INTERPRETATION OF SIGN.
PEIRCE'S SEMIOTICS IN THE CONTEXT OF
THE 'CRITIQUE OF THE MODEL OF
REPRESENTATION'**

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I would like to identify a certain weakness (certainly not the only one) which is characteristic, in my view, of the 'critique of the model of representation' or of the project of 'overturning the hegemony of representation', popular in philosophical circles inspired by Heidegger's writings. According to Heidegger's influential interpretation of modernity — which, by the way, is indebted to Hegelian philosophy of history — the logic of the development of modern thought is entirely subordinated to one idea: the idea of absolute domination of the subject as the power of discursive representation. This interpretation provides a unified vision of the history of modernity (beginning with Cartesian subjectivism) as the history of increasing relativization of all aspects of reality to the subject and its capacity to represent and to form judgements. This unified picture of modernity constitutes the common point of reference and inspiration for many intellectual enterprises under the banner of deconstruction, hermeneutics, philosophy of difference, and the critique of Enlightenment. The same interpretation is explicitly or tacitly assumed in postmodernist accounts of contemporary culture, according to which our task as post-modern thinkers is to abandon, overthrow, and shatter the model of representation.

On closer inspection, sweeping, *prima facie* homogenous interpretations of history often break up into myriads of heterogeneous, hardly congruous shards, hastily patched together to form a peculiar whole. I believe that Heidegger's one-sided interpretation of modernity obscures certain crucial tendencies, differences,

and schisms that occurred in modern thought from the time of late scholasticism, which gave rise to the idea of a theory of representation, up to Husserl's phenomenology and analytic logical semantics, which incorporated various versions of the theory. Yet I do not intend to delve into a wholesale critique of this account of the modern era.¹ As I see it, Heidegger's view of modernity, as well as the anti-modern philosophy encouraged by him, underestimates or even remains blind to the possibilities contained in the modern model of representation. The most obvious reason for narrowing down or oversimplifying the historical perspective is the belief that the development of the theory of representation is inextricably connected with the idea of autonomous subject. Due to this Hegelian superstition it is difficult to see that Kantian transcendentalism (as well as — from a different point of view — Hume's phenomenalism) paves the way for the subject-free epistemology. It is only in the latter that the theory of representation reaches a more developed stage. Yet there is another reason — equally fundamental, although less obvious and less frequently noted — namely, the dichotomy of interpretation and use of sign, a distinction accompanied by a tendency to maximize the role of the former factor up to the point of excluding the issue of use from semiotics. By considering Peirce's theory of sign, I hope to show that it is possible to develop the modern theory of representation in such a way as to make it free both of the myth of autonomous subject of cognition and of the interpretation—use dichotomy. I will focus on the latter theme, by showing the influence of pragmatism on Peirce's theory of sign and semiotic interpretation.

A characteristic feature of post-structuralism (hence its name) is its attachment to the signifying—signified distinction, taken from de Saussure. Given that de Saussure's view of sign rejuvenates the Enlightenment idea of autonomous and arbitrary discourse, it is rather surprising that French semiology loyally remains within the boundaries established by this distinction. "Cutting off the reference of a sign opens up the possibility of an infinite game of difference and repetition" — this is the fundamental idea of French post-structuralists. Yet the project of reducing the complex structure of representation to the relation of substituting one sign for another goes back to the Enlightenment model of representation.²

One might wonder, therefore, whether the 'deconstruction' of the signifying—signified relation is not just a delayed reaction to the fall of the Enlightenment theory of representation. Post-structuralists wish to preserve the immanent plane of interpretation which allows for referring one sign to another while ruling out reference to anything that would fail to serve as a sign or to the use of sign in

¹A very interesting critique of Heidegger's interpretation of modernity has been offered by Alain Renaut (1997: part 1, ch. 1).

²Michel Foucault, often regarded as a poststructuralist himself, brilliantly brought out the fundamental role played by the idea of transparent discourse in Enlightenment epistemology. Cf. Foucault 1992: ch. 3, esp. p. 65.

practice, which encompasses both linguistic and nonlinguistic activities as an integral whole. On the flip side, they shatter the classical picture of a homogeneous and transparent discourse by introducing to this immanent plane of interpretation ‘shifts’, ‘differentials’, ‘crevices’, ‘clashes’, ‘folds’, etc. A similar remark applies to post-Heideggerian hermeneutics, which also posits the immanent plane of interpretation, which only allows an intertextual dialogue while postulating the open-ended game of interpretative horizons, the inexhaustible character of sense, etc.

As a justification for this ambivalent attachment to the Enlightenment theory of sign, it could be pointed out that insofar as we consider the theory of sign — as well as the theory of representation — there is nothing but silence between *La logique de Port-Royal* and *Cours de linguistique générale*. Such an assessment is plausible, to a certain degree, since neither Kant nor any of his followers explicitly elaborated on the theory of sign and representation, although several Neo-Kantians attempted to transform Kant’s logic into a philosophy of language. Wilhelm von Humboldt extolled language as an ‘involuntary emanation of the spirit’, Hegel spoke highly of speech, the concepts of representation and image took centre stage in Schopenhauer’s philosophy, Marx toyed with Hegelian ideas of *Vorstellung* and *Darstellung*, Mauthner made an attempt at a ‘critique of language’, which was to inspire Wittgenstein, Nietzsche was aware of the metaphorical character of cognitive processes, etc. The only exception in this history of silence was Peirce, who in the second half of the nineteenth century developed a formal theory of sign and representation.

In the present context, Peirce’s semiotic thought seems interesting for two reasons. First, he puts forward a theory of representation in the framework of a universal theory of sign, distinguishing a genuine representation, which is continuous (“triadic”) in character, from its degenerate types taking the form of discrete combinations of binary (‘dyadic’) relations. Second, in his theory of inquiry, he brings to light the specifically practical and communicative dimension of a sign, thus paving the way for the holistic account of experience, thought, and action. Suitably directed investigations into Peirce’s ‘eccentric’ enterprise may help to fill the gap in our knowledge about the development of modern theory of representation, and thus to clear up misunderstandings which constrain the present-day discussion on the issue of the ‘hegemony of the model of representation’. By “suitable direction” I mean a certain interpretative choice. Namely, one model of construing Peirce’s works (adopted e.g. by Derrida and Eco) regards him as a forerunner of various contemporary theories of sign, semiology, deconstruction, etc. By contrast, in my view, which by no means diminishes the originality of his ideas, he is primarily a continuator — as well as a critic — of fundamental tenets of modern philosophy, who, in particular, revived the deteriorated empiricism of his time.

1. The post-Kantian theory of representation

The Polish term for representation, *przedstawienie*, is actually a translation of Latin *praesentatio*, not *repraesentatio*. It is easy to locate the distinction between presentation and representation in the historical context. It can be found in the form of the good old distinction between sense data and concepts, which — at least since Kant's time — is construed as applying to the order of representation (*Vorstellung*) so that concepts are considered representations of representations or second-level representations. It is worth emphasizing that, as mentioned above, no post-Kantian thinker, nor, of course, Kant himself, sought to formulate a theory of representation or at least come up with a definition of the concept. This failure is remarkable given that, after Kant, epistemology deploys the notion of representation as a fundamental concept. As far as I know, it was Karl Leonard Reinhold who first put forward a sketch of a theory of representation in his famous Principle of Consciousness, according to which "in consciousness, the subject distinguishes the representation from the subject and the object and relates the representation to both" (cf. Reinhold 1790: 167). What immediately springs to mind is that such an account of representation and consciousness latently underpinned the entire post-Cartesian philosophy of subject. Take, for instance, the definition of sign offered by the *Port-Royal* school:

but when we regard a certain object only as representing another, the idea which we have of it is the idea of a sign. It is in this way that we commonly regard maps and pictures. Thus the sign contains two ideas, one of the thing which represents, another of the thing represented, and its nature consists in exciting the second by means of the first. (Arnauld and Nicole 1964: 42).

However, it would be a grave mistake to overlook the gap between Reinhold's theory of consciousness and the Enlightenment theory of sign. The latter is an expression of what *we* (who think after Kant and, presumably, take our cue from him) would like to call a naïve, realist approach to the object of representation. This 'naïve realism' finds expression in a typical turn of phrase: something is a representation (or representative) of something else insofar as it *stands for* (replaces) it *qua* its *sign, likeness, copy*, from which one can form a *secondary copy* to be stored in memory etc. On this view, the binary model 'copy—copying' is extrapolated to all 'levels of cognition': things present (manifest) themselves to senses, mind registers these presentations in the form of mental images (copies of sense impressions), which are stored by memory, which in turn enables speech to represent the same things by copying mental images into spoken sounds, which are then rendered into written marks, which secures the maximum durability of representation. Of course, neither thought nor speech and writing are able to

exhibit a thing if the thing fails to present itself to the senses: they can *merely* give signs, which stand for the thing ‘in its absence’.

The assumption that the *object of representation* can be transferred from a lower level of cognition to a higher one is regarded as innocuous precisely because representation is considered to be a duplicate, a copy of a copy, another record of what has already been recorded, albeit in a different form (a written mark constitutes the fourth level of copying the empirical world). Hence the operation of sign is barely discernible, ‘latent’, and the theory of representation fails to go beyond the binary model (the ‘third’ element — which interprets the sign as the sign of a given object and mediates the relation of representation — goes unnoticed). By contrast, Reinhold has no illusions: what is represented, the object of cognition, is not ready for being represented like a figure ready for being impressed in clay; instead, it is constituted in consciousness precisely as the object of representation. In his *Principle of Consciousness*, Reinhold responds, already from a historical distance, to the question posed by Kant in 1772 in a letter to Marcus Hertz:

How my understanding may formulate real principles concerning the possibility of such concepts, with which principles experience must be in exact agreement and which nevertheless are independent of experience — this question, of how the faculty of the understanding achieves this conformity with the things themselves is still left in a state of obscurity. (Kant’s letter to Hertz of February 21, 1772, Kant 1902: 10, 131; quoted in Nitzan 2014: 57)

In brief — how can something within the mind represent something outside the mind? The answer is *critical*: not only is the supposed extra-mental object of representation unknowable — it is also incomprehensible. Due to Reinhold, the concept of representation (*Vorstellung*; Polish *przedstawienie*) became a technical notion, not to be confused with common metaphors of (re)presenting [*przedstawianie*], being a representative [*przedstawicielstwo*], copy, likeness, image, etc. More importantly, the binary Enlightenment model was replaced with a triadic model (what is representing — what is represented — representation), in which the stress is put on the third element, the relation of representation, or rather on the consciousness in which the relation is constituted.

Yet Reinhold, like his master Kant, regards consciousness as a primitive fact, preceding the transcendental reflection, impossible to derive from experience, unprovable, and indefinable. Consciousness is fundamental, constitutive, but not creative, that is, ‘world making’ (Reinhold was no Nelson Goodman!). It was Hegel who first proclaimed that we are in no position to assume that the cognitively fundamental subject—object relation is constituted in itself, i.e. independently of the historical development of self-cognition, just as we cannot assume that the object and the subject of cognition are constituted in themselves, that is, independently of the cognition itself (as Kant claimed). It is then plausible to

suggest that in Hegel's speculative philosophy the theory of representation takes a *dynamic* form.

Still, one should immediately point out that the stage for Hegel's dialectic was set by Reinhold's account of representation. Although Hegel brings into light the naivety of adopting an 'ahistorically' constituted structure of representation, his dialectic allows no room for authentic creativity in the self-development of knowledge since it fails to grant anything that would hinder or distract the process. I would like to contrast this strand of post-Kantian philosophy with the route chosen by Peirce, since his philosophy cognition is understood, in principle, as an open-ended and creative, albeit controlled, process of learning, in which perception, discursive reasoning, and action are intermingled *through and through*. In order to throw this contrast into sharp relief, I will try to show how Peirce's 'semiotic idealism' is counterbalanced by his pragmatism. Let me point out in advance that Peirce's philosophy rests on a subtle balancing manoeuvre by virtue of which an idealistically motivated theory of continuous semiosis and a pragmatically motivated theory of the use of sign complement each other in such a way as to render the interpretation—use dichotomy moot.

2. The semiotic theory of representation

From the proposition that every thought is a sign, it follows that every thought must address itself to some other, must determine some other, since that is the essence of a sign. (5.253)³

Peirce claims that every act of cognition and thinking is performed by means of signs and has a semiotic structure. Peirce uses the terms "sign" and "representation" interchangeably. A sentence drawn from another passage: "The idea of representation involves infinity, since a representation is not really such unless it be interpreted in another representation" (8.268) expresses the same thought as the assertion quoted above, albeit it explicitly introduces the concept of infinity. Given the ideal limit of *semiosis* (semiotic interpretation), infinity of representation (or sign) follows from the definition of representation (sign) as an irreducible 'triadic relation':

my definition of a representamen⁴ is as follows: a REPRESENTAMEN
is a subject of a triadic relation TO a second, called its object, FOR

³It is customary to quote Peirce's *Collected Papers* (1931—35, 1958) by referring to the number of volume (1—8) and section. For instance "5.253" refers to volume 5, section 253.

⁴Peirce uses the term "sign" ambiguously, referring either to the whole triadic structure (then he often employs the neologism "representamen") or to the first argument of this structure. Here, I will use the term "sign" in the former sense (sometimes emphasizing that I have the whole structure in mind), and "medium" in the latter.

a third, called its INTERPRETANT, this triadic relation being such that the REPRESENTAMEN determines its interpretant to stand *in the same triadic relation to the same object* for some interpretant. (1.541; my italics)

Each sign is defined by three elements (medium, object, interpretant) and three relations: meaning, i.e. the relation of the sign to the medium; reference, i.e. the relation of the sign to the object; interpretation, i.e. the relation of the sign to another sign. Peirce emphasizes that the ‘triadic’ structure of sign cannot be reduced to a combination of ‘dyadic’, i.e. binary, relations — they constitute a unity. This fact is underscored by a recursive definition of interpretation in the passage quoted above. Elsewhere, Peirce remarks that a sign is “anything which determines something else (its interpretant) to refer to an object to which itself refers (its object) in the same way, the interpretant becoming in turn a sign, and so on ad infinitum” (2.303, cf. 292).

Hanna Buczyńska-Garewicz (1994: 43) calls attention to the self-reproductive character of this triadic structure:

Characteristically, this classical definition, constituting the core of Peirce’s account, already points to a fundamental feature of the triad, its capacity to reproduce itself: the triad, by its very essence, indicates another triad, one interpretant must lead to another. Each representation, once given, marks the beginning of an infinite chain of interpretations.

Thus representation is *continuous*, that is to say, it is conceivable only as a chain of interpretations which cannot be exhausted by any finite set of signs. This conception of logical continuity is of great importance to us, since it serves as the basis for Peirce’s distinction between genuine and degenerate signs and thereby provides the framework for the whole issue of ‘degenerate semiosis’. Before I turn to this key issue, let me note that — although interpretation is a process by means of which a successive sign inherits the triadic relation with respect to the object of representation (cf. 2.274), and in this sense interpretation is the proper substrate of ‘semiosis’ — an infinite series of signs extend in all three dimensions of representation (sign). It is testified by the following passage:

The object of representation can be nothing but a representation of which the first representation is the interpretant. But an endless series of representations, each representing the one behind it, may be conceived to have an absolute object at its limit. The meaning of a representation can be nothing but a representation. [...] So there is an infinite regression here. Finally, the interpretant is nothing

but another representation to which the torch of truth is handed along; and as representation, it has its interpretant again. Lo, another infinite series. (1.339)

So when Peirce insists that the essence of sign (representation) is the "capability of the endless translation of sign into sign" (7.357), he has all three axes of representation in mind: meaning, reference, and interpretation. It means that a sign (representation) fundamentally differs from the direct manifestation, since no element of sign could be given directly — either what the sign says or what the sign is about, or even the mode of reference.

We can speak of a 'triadic' model of sign in the case of any theory which introduces the 'third' element (thought, concept, sense) mediating between the sign (medium) and its object. We encounter such an account already in Stoics (by the way, Stoic theory of sign was an important source of inspiration for Peirce; see Buczyńska-Garewicz 1994: 30; cf. Dąmbaska 1984). Yet the 'triadic' model put forward by Peirce is distinct in that his mediation is continuous, that is, it proceeds in all three directions, so that all three elements provide points of reference for different perspectives on one and the same semiotic process: the medium mediates between the object of the sign and its interpretant in that it has a certain meaning which constitutes the way in which the object is grasped; the object mediates between the medium and the interpretant in that it provides a common reference; finally, the interpretant mediates between the medium and the object in that it determines another sign to serve as a representation of the object.

3. Genuine vs degenerate semiosis

Signs live their own lives. For Peirce, a paradigmatic case of sign is a conventional symbol which develops its sense in a series of inferences without beginning or end. Insofar as we look at a sign from the point of view of 'representation', 'interpretation', 'mediation', we are forced to admit that it is arbitrary (*unmotivated* in de Saussure's sense). In other words, it bears no natural relation to its object. After all, the very notions of *the object of sign* and *the subject of sign* are only meant to account for the two-directional character of the process of semiosis, in which a sign both interprets and is interpreted, translates another sign and is translated into another. The use of these concepts in a theory of 'mediating representation' by no means implies that the sign is embedded in direct manifestation, in a thing-in-itself transcendental with respect to the sign, or in self-consciousness of the transcendental mind which precedes all signs. By focusing on this particular aspect of Peirce's thought (which might be called 'semiotic idealism'), Derrida arrives at the conclusion that the notion of 'arbitrary sign' assumes a much more radical form in Peirce than in de Saussure, since the former rejects, according to

Derrida, the ‘logocentrism’ and the ‘metaphysics of presence’, which overshadow the European linguistics from de Saussure to Hjelmslev (Derrida 1976). As I see it, Derrida’s interpretation adequately grasps one aspect of Peirce’s philosophy, semiotic idealism, yet it disregards the project in its entirety, since it overlooks the aspect which might be labelled ‘pragmatic empiricism’. Peirce’s primary ambition, as I will try to show, is to reconcile these two tendencies without reducing one to another.

The two facets of the philosophy of sign which I hope to bring out find their expression in the ambiguous use of the very notion of semiosis. Namely, “semiosis” can denote a translation of one sign into another in the continuous process of ‘sign-interpretation’, or else it can signify the use, or operation, of a sign in a real cognitive practice, the ‘sign-action’ (cf. Komendziński 1996: 98). This ambiguity applies to many of Peirce’s notions, including the concept of truth, reality, communication, and, of course, the concept of sign itself. The tension between these two perspectives is also visible in normative principles of the ‘theory of inquiry’. Let us begin by distinguishing a ‘genuine’ and ‘degenerate’ sign (“degenerate” is a descriptive, non-evaluative term borrowed by Peirce from geometry). As Buczyńska-Garewicz (1994) explains:

The notion of a degenerate sign plays an explicitly independent role in Peirce’s semiotics. It can be understood and explicated only with respect to the genuine, ‘true’ sign. At the same time, the degenerate sign is a dominant phenomenon in the universe of signs — almost everything in the empirical realm of signs is of this kind. [...] Hence the distinction between a genuine and degenerate sign is of utmost importance both to semiotics as a general theory of sign and to its applications in the form of empirical investigation into particular domains of signs, i.e. to various regions of culture.

A sign in the narrower sense is a triad which cannot be analyzed into binary relations or into monads. In other words, a genuine sign involves meaning, reference, and interpretation joined together by an irreducible, substantial bond. Otherwise a sign is degenerate.

But if the triple relation between the sign, its object and the mind, is degenerate, then of the three pairs: sign — object, sign — mind, object — mind two at least are in dual relations which constitute the triple relation. (3.361)

In a broader sense, a sign includes both a genuine and a degenerate triad. Generally speaking, a degenerate sign occurs if at least one aspect of the triad can be characterized in isolation from the whole triad. In order to present Peirce’s

theory of degenerate sign in a more precise way, we would have to start with his theory of categories. Yet, since it goes beyond my brief to discuss this issue fully, I will just present the relation between degenerate and genuine signs in the context of the general triadic structure of sign.

First, it should be noted that in Peirce's theory a genuine sign can only be a general law, so it is unable to exist in the 'world of fact' (1.478). Still, for Peirce, a general law cannot be considered in isolation from the possibility of its actualization in a concrete empirical fact (1.304). This duality in the account of sign is thrown into sharp relief in the following passage:

For while a triad if genuine cannot be in the world of quality nor in that of fact, yet it may be a mere law, or regularity, of quality or of fact. But a thoroughly genuine triad is separated entirely from those worlds and exists in the universe of representations. Indeed, representation necessarily involves a genuine triad. For it involves a sign, or representamen, of some kind, outward or inward, mediating between an object and an interpreting thought. Now this is neither a matter of fact, since thought is general, nor is it a matter of law, since thought is living. (1.480)

The latter, metaphorical description of thought as 'living' reveals Peirce's view that both nature and cognition are evolutionary in character. While natural evolution consists — as Peirce would have us believe — in developing habits, the scientific practice, understood as a controlled, self-correcting practice of producing habits is just a special case of natural evolutionary processes. The semiotics of 'living' representation must account for semiosis' oscillation between the habit produced by the sign and the role of action which constitutes a symbolic interpretation of this habit.

As for the relation to an object, Peirce divides signs into symbols, indices (indexicals), and icons. Indices and icons are degenerate signs.

A Symbol is a law, or regularity of the indefinite future. Its Interpretant must be of the same description; and so must be also the complete immediate Object, or meaning. But a law necessarily governs, or "is embodied in" individuals, and prescribes some of their qualities. Consequently, a constituent of a Symbol may be an Index, and a constituent may be an Icon. A man walking with a child points his arm up into the air and says, "There is a balloon". The pointing arm is an essential part of the symbol without which the latter would convey no information. But if the child asks, "What is a balloon", and the man replies, "It is something like a great big soap bubble", he makes the image a part of the symbol. Thus, while the complete

object of a symbol, that is to say, its meaning, is of the nature of a law, it must denote an individual, and must signify a character. A genuine symbol is a symbol that has a general meaning. There are two kinds of degenerate symbols, the Singular Symbol whose Object is an existent individual, and which signifies only such characters as that individual may realize; and the Abstract Symbol, whose only Object is a character. (2.293)

Further on, he presents the relations between symbolic, indexical, and iconic signs in the following way:

A Symbol is a sign naturally fit to declare that the set of objects which is denoted by whatever set of indices may be in certain ways attached to it is represented by an icon associated with it. (2.295)

This account shows that in actual semiotic processes degenerate and genuine signs are intermingled and cooperate with each other. A genuine symbol "owes its significant virtue to a character which can only be realized by the aid of its Interpretant" (2.92). By contrast, in the case of an iconic sign, the relation between the medium and a certain object rests on the similarity between them (on their sharing a property or properties), and in the case of indices — the relation consists in a physical connection between the medium and the object. These relations exist in their own right, independently of any semiotic interpretation. Nevertheless, cooperation of all three sorts of sign is indispensable if the sign is to refer to something and convey some comprehensible information. Peirce emphasizes that "the only way of directly communicating an idea is by means of an icon" (2.278); on the flip side, it is by the use of an image, a diagram, or a metaphor (i.e. iconic signs of a monad, a dyad, or triad, respectively, 2.277) that the foundation of the sign or its meaning becomes fossilized; so it is both a convenience and a limitation. The case of indexical signs is similar. It is only by means of a demonstrative gesture or a demonstrative pronoun that we can distinguish the real world from merely possible worlds produced by signs (cf. Appel 1988: 71). Karl-Otto Appel emphasizes that according to Peirce's theory:

The point of the perceptual judgements as compared with mere assertive propositions rests precisely on the fact that the former, through the function of indexical signs are capable of integrating novel empirical informations into the conceptual-linguistic interpretation of the world. They extend the extensional and hence also the intensional meaning of terms." (Appel 1988: 72)

On the flip side, we can speak of 'petrification' of the process of interpretation resulting in the reference being 'confined' to a fixed range of denoted objects.

As for the division of signs on account of their relation to the interpreting of thought, namely into terms, propositions, and argumentations, Peirce stipulates

that argumentation is the genuine form of sign, its first degenerate form is a proposition, and the second degenerate form is a concept (term) (2.250—2.273) (cf. also MS 307, p. 12, quoted in Buczyńska-Garewicz 1994: 12). Elsewhere, Peirce states that "a term is a rudimentary proposition, a proposition is, in its turn, a rudimentary argumentation" (2.344). Again — a genuine semiosis is actualized in infinite inferential sequences. The trichotomy term—proposition—argumentation corresponds to the particular modalities of the object of sign: its potentiality, actuality, or necessity. Symbolic representation, which is properly actualized in an inferential chain, must be, as it were, objectified in a *propositional symbol*, which refers to an actual fact, and in an *abstract symbol*, which refers to a qualitative possibility, so that a general law (the object of argumentation) is referred to the universe of facts and the universe of qualities (2.293).

Finally, let us examine the issue which is central to Peirce's semiotics — that of degenerate interpretation. As Peirce puts it: "No doubt, intelligent consciousness must enter into the series. If the series of successive interpretants comes to an end, the sign is thereby rendered imperfect, at least" (2.303). Buczyńska-Garewicz speaks of a need for a holistic account of genuine and degenerate semiosis:

What is interesting in Peirce's thought is the combination of two facets: on the one hand, he stresses the intellectual character of semiosis, and on the other — he also acknowledges non-intellectual effects of signs. Semioticians usually limit themselves to one of these approaches. By contrast, by allowing for forms of 'interpretation' distinct from the logical one, Peirce attempts to encompass all these phenomena in a single holistic theory. (Buczyńska-Garewicz 1994: 81)

From the perspective of a genuine interpretation, considered in isolation from actual processes of semiosis, the only interpretant of a sign (representation) can be a 'logical interpretant', that is, a complete triadic sign, a symbol together with all its logical consequences. Nevertheless, "we may take a sign in so broad a sense that the interpretant of it is not a thought, but an action or experience, or we may even enlarge the meaning of sign that its interpretant is a mere quality of feeling" (8.322). Peirce distinguishes intellectual (logical), energetic, and emotional interpretants of a sign, albeit the last two ones are degenerate forms of the first one.⁵ As far as emotional, and behavioural interpretants are concerned, Peirce

⁵In 5.475 we learn that „the first proper significate effect of a sign is a feeling produced by it.” Further on we read: "This fémotional interpretantó, as I call it, may amount to much more than that feeling or recognition; and in some cases, it is the only proper significate effect that the sign produces. Thus, the performance of a piece of concerted music is a sign. It conveys, and is intended to convey, the composer's musical ideas; but these usually consist merely in a series of feelings. If a sign produces any further proper significate effect, it will do so through the mediation of the emotional

seems to believe that they appear in all signs without exception. Buczyńska-Garewicz pushes the point even further and puts forward a hypothesis that in his later writings (especially in letters to Lady Welby) Peirce preferred a joint rather than disjunctive understanding of the differentiation of interpretants, according to which "no kind of interpretant is independent — they constitute three layers of interpretation" (Buczyńska-Garewicz 1994: 92). It is not to deny that from the perspective of continuous semiosis the emotional and behavioural interpretations of a sign go beyond the scope of proper semiosis, they are "non-semiotic effects of a sign", or even interfere with the very nature of sign, disturbing its "capability of self-reproduction", since they "fail to go beyond themselves and they end the process of semiosis" (Buczyńska-Garewicz 1994: 82). The nature of those indispensable, albeit usually 'unofficial', associations which link the argumentative strings of symbols to our sensations and behavioural reactions, is to be clarified by the principle of pragmatism.

4. The principle of pragmatism

Pragmatism — in its original form from the year 1878 — is, for Peirce, "a method of ascertaining the meanings of intellectual concepts" (5.467). Its aim is to separate clear and distinct concepts from vague or empty ones. Also James, in regarding Peirce as the father of the movement, regards pragmatism as, in the first place, a method of conceptual analysis, and only in the second place as a 'theory of truth', although the latter description is, as James himself admits, infelicitous (cf. Putnam 1995: 5—27). For James, the pragmatist method is first of all a method of settling metaphysical controversies regarded as insoluble (James 1968: 142). What is the nature of Peirce's method? Here is one of the typical accounts, which was offered in his Harvard Lectures on pragmatism:

Pragmatism is the principle that every theoretical judgment expressible in a sentence in the indicative mood is a confused form of thought whose only meaning, if it has any, lies in its tendency to enforce a corresponding practical maxim expressible as a conditional sentence having its apodosis in the imperative mood.

interpretant, and such further effect will always involve an effort. I call it the energetic interpretant. The effort may be a muscular one, as it is in the case of the command to ground arms; but it is much more usually an exertion upon the Inner World, a mental effort." In the subsequent section Peirce introduces the notion of "logical interpretant," which is the meaning of a general concept (and hence it cannot be the intellectual effort, which is a singular act) and, in being a sign, requires its own logical interpretant in the form of a sign, "so that it cannot be the ultimate logical interpretant of the concept. It can be proved that the only mental effect that can be so produced and that is not a sign but is of a general application is a habit-change; meaning by a habit-change a modification of a person's tendencies toward action, resulting from previous experiences or from previous exertions of his will or acts, or from a complexus of both kinds of cause."

(5.18) In other words, the pragmatic principle requires that we translate each sign (word, concept, statement, doctrine, etc.) into a hypothetical imperative (or a series of such imperatives) of the form: "If you want to produce such and such effect, you must carry out such and such action," whose antecedent refers to possible intentions and the consequent — to possible actions. The above formulation is important insofar as it shows "the dependence of the indicative mode on the imperative one" (Buczyńska-Garewicz 1994: 107), or, to put simply, it expresses Peirce's fundamental conviction that the whole content of any thought amounts to the habit (in the sense of a rule of action!) to which we are committed by accepting the thought. That is why Peirce insists that „the most perfect account of a concept that words can convey will consist in a description of the habit which that concept is calculated to produce" (5.491). It is worth emphasizing that no such description can be satisfactory unless it involves references to human goals and specifies the attainment of those goals in terms of observable outcomes of actions which are possible to perform. Thus pragmatism eliminates all concepts and conceptions devoid of a relevant reference to aims that are achievable in the realm of observable phenomena, at least 'in the long run'. Besides, the method is supposed to find out the finest differences between concepts via analysis of their practical consequences.

I agree with Buczyńska-Garewicz that one of the premises of pragmatism was the critique of Cartesianism. Peirce wanted to dispel the myth of cognition established by the post-Cartesian philosophy. He intended to show what our thinking must consist of in order to increase our knowledge. He based his idea of normative theory of inquiry on observations of real scientific activities. In this way he arrived at the conception of rational critique, according to which we must actively intervene in natural processes so as to be able to falsify our views about nature. We must interfere with our natural environment in order to get clues enabling us to distinguish the *actual* world of experience from the possible worlds of thought. For this reason conceptual contents must be analyzed in terms of hypothetical empirical results of our actions and mental processes. We must intelligently interfere with our environment not only to detect potential errors in our theories but also to expose disinformation generated by direct perception.

In this connection, it is also easy to see the extent to which Peirce's semiotics differs from Hegel's self-dynamism of cognition. Hegel discounts the role of direct perception by considering a grotesque image of *pure* indexicals taken *in separation from any theory* and assumes that truth must be entirely contained in the development of a priori concepts, or more precisely, in a priori self-development of concepts taken as a whole. Thus Hegel, by starting from an accurate, albeit trivial, observation that indexicals such as "this one" or "this one here and now" cannot — in isolation from our conceptual apparatus — represent any definite object of cognition or provide any information about the world, proceeds to an utterly

implausible and harmful assessment that truth consists *merely* in the conceptual coherence. Presumably, we are dealing here with a lingering way of understanding empiricism according to which accepting the indispensability of direct experience in cognition boils down to admitting that our conceptual schemes are determined by something preconceptual.

At the beginning, I said that I regard Peirce as a reviver of empiricism. Namely, this revival consisted — in my view — in asserting that, in order to acknowledge the decisive impact of experience on our cognition, we need not assume that our concepts are determined by something preconceptual (preconceptual sense data or something like this). In the framework of the theory of inquiry it can be plausibly claimed that (1) perception engages our conceptual capabilities, (2) for this reason, perception is sometimes misleading, (3) in the long run, errors or disinformation contained in perception can be found out and rooted out in the course of scientific investigations, (4) accounting for the possibility of ‘revising the facts’ (occurring at the level of our basic description of the world, which cannot be disregarded in talking about the observed facts) does not require the assumption that we have, or can have, direct access to preconceptual reality (whatever that means). As Putnam put it:

The fact that perception is sometimes erroneous does not show that even *non*-erroneous perception is really perception of “appearances.” And it may also help if we realize that access to a common reality does not require access to something *preconceptual*. It requires, rather, that we be able to form *shared* concepts. (Putnam 1995: 21)

The principle of pragmatism can thus be understood as a hint that the criterion of truth cannot amount to correspondence of concepts to something preconceptual (or non-conceptual), nor can it be equated with immanent coherence of concepts; instead, it consists in the unanimity achieved *in the long run* in the course of scientific inquiry in which perception, discursive thought, and action are mixed together.

It is not my aim to question the point of the popular (especially in the continental philosophy) ‘critique of the model of representation’. I simply wish to identify a gap in the discussion revolving around this issue. Of course, the gap is not caused by not appreciating Peirce — on the contrary, he is appreciated — but by misconstruing his philosophy, by overemphasizing what I called the idealist tendency of semiotics. If we track the history of the theory of representation by going *exclusively* in the direction set by Reinhold, then presumably we will end up regarding Hegel’s dialectic as its peak achievement, and Peirce’s semiotics just as a sophisticated continuation of this tradition and a sort of upheaval which shakes the foundations of modern thought and anticipates the contemporary *deconstruction* (cf. Derrida 1976). Yet such an account of Peirce’s philosophy blatantly disregards

his pragmatism, and in particular the pragmatist tendency of his semiotics. We are not talking about a split or tension in Peirce's semiotics (though we could plausibly speak of a tension in interpretations of his thought) but about a subtle equilibrium, a result of striking a balance between opposing factors.

The account offered by the *idealist* reconstruction of semiotics is unsatisfactory if we wish to comprehend the contribution of semiotics to the theory of inquiry, to our understanding of relations holding between perception, thought, and action in cognitive practice. From the perspective of ideal semiosis, the genuine sign is a general, conventional rational symbol (i.e. an argument), yet each actual sign requires a physical substrate as a medium of communication, it occurs in the subjective world as a counterpart of concrete mental acts, it is connected with perceptual impressions by means of indices, it is spread in communication via images and metaphors, it is an object of observation (also with respect to logical structure, namely, as a diagram), it has an impact on our lives and minds by way of its emotional and behavioural effects. In his universal semiotics, Peirce, if I understand his intention correctly, set out to overcome the interpretation—use dichotomy and to this end he introduced the twofold (and yet holistic) notion enabling us to look at the whole spectrum of signs either from the perspective of genuine semiosis, which, as it were, incorporates monadic and dyadic components into the triadic structure of a complete sign, or from the perspective of degenerate semiosis, which relativizes all signs to the context of actual human actions and experiences. This duality of the account of sign constitutes the true heart of Peirce's philosophy of sign and, on the flip side, is the source of great difficulty in its understanding.

It is in this context that we should consider the distinction between presentation and representation. The duality discussed above forces us to distinguish between dyadic and monadic substructures of continuous representation (which cannot be separated from the triadic structure of sign) together with natural *re-presentations* [*przedstawienia*] of objects acting on us and natural *manifestations* of qualities (which occur in their own right, independently of semiotic interpretation). Semiosis is a continuous process, and its suitable substrates are inferential sequences of symbols. However, in actual cognitive activities, the process of interpreting a sign is repeatedly interrupted and blocked. Furthermore, an overarching, or universal, theory can require nothing more than a balance between the interpretation of a sign in ideal semiosis and the use of sign in 'living' cognitive practices. This principle immediately discounts the approaches which conflate both layers of semiosis or just pass over one of them. It is therefore hard to agree with the opinion (I am not sure whether it can be attributed to Derrida himself) that Peirce was a forerunner of deconstruction. By the same token, any attempts at placing his philosophy within the tradition of transcendental philosophy distort his overall intention. Equally misguided are, in my view, interpretations

of Peirce's semiotics offered exclusively in terms of behaviourist, interactionist theories of sign (Mead, Morris), given that the point of these readings is to reduce continuous semiosis to social communication and the logical interpretation to an emotional-behavioural interpretation.⁶

As a final point, let me invoke a celebrated fragment of the scattered Peircean oeuvre, which, ironically, has served as a motto for mutually exclusive interpretations of his semiotics. I would like to leave it to the reader to decide whether this passage emphasizes, or not, the double nature of sign, thereby mocking both the radically 'idealist' and radically 'naturalist' interpretations of Peirce's semiotics

Symbols grow. They come into being by development out of other signs, particularly from icons, or from mixed signs partaking of the nature of icons and symbols. We think only in signs. These mental signs are of mixed nature; the symbol-parts of them are called concepts. If a man makes a new symbol, it is by thoughts involving concepts. So it is only out of symbols that a new symbol can grow. *Omne symbolum de symbolo*. A symbol, once in being, spreads among the peoples. In use and in experience, its meaning grows. Such words as force, law, wealth, marriage, bear for us very different meanings from those they bore to our barbarous ancestors. The symbol may, with Emerson's sphynx, say to man: Of thine eye I am eyebeam. (2.302)

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