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Introduction to the 2019 Peirce Section

Celebrating Charls Pearson, and remembering Eliseo Fernández

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Charls Pearson launched this journal's special section dedicated to the work of Charles Sanders Peirce under the heading "Peircean Semiotics and the Philosophy of Inquiry." He emphasized in this introductory article how Peirce's philosophy of inquiry is built totally upon his semiotics. He went on to clarify the scope of the section:

This section will include papers covering three broad topics: papers on applications, papers seeking a better understanding, and even papers extending Peirce's semiotics and philosophy of inquiry (Pearson 2010a: 230).

Pearson immediately set to work bringing his enormous expertise to set the tone of the Peirce Section, putting forward important papers such as "The status of semiotic theory" (2010b). Here, he described a dreary contemporary state in semiotic research, in which good theories lie side by side with bad theories and practitioners do not adequately differentiate between them (237).

Many of Pearson's own contributed articles to the section have had, what I would consider, a methodological nature and vision. These articles often clear up prevalent and common misinterpretations of Peircean ideas. From my estimation, the culmination of this research is represented in an article I had the privilege of offering editorial assistance on, called "Eight common fallacies of elementary semiotics" (2017).¹ This short work, in an extremely cogent

¹ Since taking over editorial responsibility for the section, I have been busy publishing papers that have been previously approved or commissioned by Charlie himself. So far, we have published the following: the before-mentioned article by Pearson (2017); one article, to be discussed shortly, by Fernandez (2017); two articles by Donna West (2018a; 2018b); an article by myself (Campbell 2018); an article by Tony Jappy (2018); a paper by Julia Ponzio (2018); and an *In Memoriam* (Pearson 2018) for Fernández, to be discussed shortly. Simultaneously, I have also commissioned some research to further introduce our readers to developments in

expression, laid bare an enormous wealth of semiotic insight. Taken together, these fallacies explain the methodological orientation of a fully (triadic) non-dualist semiotic worldview, an advance of understanding, Pearson notes, “comparable to the difference in depth of understanding of physical reality allowed by Aristotelian physics and that allowed by Newtonian physics” (2017: 239). It should be observed that these fallacies also represent avenues for empirical research, research about and in the *real* world. Pearson explains in the intro that by “properly sensing and correcting these eight fallacies, we may see more deeply into semiotic structure, allowing us to develop theories more representative of that structure and thus reach a better understanding of the underlying semiotic reality.” Notably, this is a path beyond reductions to either mind-dependent reality (*ens rationis*) or mind-independent reality (*ens reale*) to embrace the reality of semiosis as a “bridge between” – the *included*, rather than excluded, middle.

What struck me most of this article was its Einsteinian tone – a lucidity of intention that I had always hoped for in semiotic research, but rarely ever saw. It seems that with this article Charlie has accomplished the dream that fellow American, the novelist turned Peirce scholar Walker Percy, had imagined for his own semiotic: “something neat and elegant and so convincing of itself that one can write it in the same offhand style as Einstein’s relativity article (almost a throwaway style. Here it is, fellows, in case you’re interested)” (Percy in Ketner 1995: xviii). I immediately and excitedly shared this article with any of my colleagues in semiotics or educational studies who would be interested, and continued to suggest the paper as foundational reading for anyone undergoing any form of semiotic research on my online network Semiotic Research Group.

One of the great strengths of Pearson’s editorial approach in this section has been the way he fostered and encouraged authors to make extended arguments over a series of articles. This (as already well stated by Charlie himself) allowed many authors to “develop an argument stream, and thus their own style, a style that will enable the reader to evaluate their differing insights and strategies for understanding, extending, and/or applying the work of Peirce” (Pearson 2012: 193).

edusemiotics (educational semiotics). Besides my before-mentioned article on edusemiotic themes, we published an interview I did with one of the founders of edusemiotics, Inna Semetsky (Semetsky and Campbell 2018), and followed this up with “A short introduction to edusemiotics” (2018) penned by Alin Olteanu and myself. In upcoming Peirce Sections, we will present several commissioned pieces on Peircean topics by a range of authors, some familiar, some new, and will also feature an interview with Charls Pearson.

What we present in this 2019 issue of the Peirce Section is the result of a great thinker given freedom to pursue his own flights of inquiry. I am talking about Eliseo Fernández. As Pearson (2018: 393) explains: “He was our leading author, contributing eleven articles on the Peircean foundations of semiotics and biosemiotics to this journal. Seven of them have already appeared and the other four had been scheduled for future publication before his death.” In this issue of CSS, we present three of these four backlogged articles. These are, respectively:

- 1) “Of thinkers and tinkerers – Science meets technology at the invention of the triode”;
- 2) “From tendencies to purposes: Peirce between Aristotle and Kant”, and;
- 3) “Habit and generalization.”

When Dr. Pearson first announced his intention to retire from his editorial duties in 2017 – and consequently recommended and suggested me to take over the post (mostly because I was young, with energy and passion for Peirce studies) – one of the very first articles he had me work on was Fernández’s breakthrough “Semiosis and emergence” (2017). Until then, I was vaguely familiar with Fernández and his contributions to the emerging biosemiotic movement but was wholly ignorant of the brilliance and deep fecundity of this thinker. Sadly, shortly after I began to work on the paper, Charlie notified me of Eliseo’s passing.

Dr. Pearson quickly set to work writing an *In Memoriam* (2018) article for his friend, and assigned me the task of bringing Eliseo’s backlogged contributions to the section to publication. After reading, summarizing, and remarking on these eleven contributions to the section chronologically, Pearson was able to contextualize the combined significance of Fernández’s late thought and research. The results are indeed remarkable.

As explored by Pearson in this article, Fernández recognizes Peirce’s concept of habit as “a centerpiece, not only of his mature semeiotic, but also of his prescient evolutionary cosmology” (Pearson 2018: 395). Habit for Peirce is a unifier between culture–nature, but also mind–matter divisions, to embrace a fully *synechist* perspective. Synechism is a scientific maxim and program of research that Peirce formulated to seek continuities where discontinuities are assumed to be permanent; to seek semiotic (that is, triadic) relations where only

dyadic (or mechanical) relations are thought to exist.² According to Fernández, the realization of this program requires a generalizing of the concept of habit itself until it essentially becomes synonymous with the modern scientific notion of *tendency*. Eliseo's "boldest move" says Pearson, consists in reversing the traditional hierarchy of substance-tendency, by arguing that from a fully semiotic perspective, tendencies are more basic than substances. We see, that at this level of abstraction, Peirce's notion of habit becomes synonymous with "a tendency to enact the same tendency every time the same precipitating circumstances are enacted. Therefore [...] habits are simply higher-order tendencies that repeatedly release lower-order tendencies into action whenever similar circumstances are reenacted" (Pearson 2018: 396).

Many of Eliseo's contributions to this section (including the three articles in this issue) have focused on exploring the possible extensions of the Peircean concept of habit. In "Habits and Generalization" for example, Fernández explains how that once our notion of habit is sufficiently generalized "its connotational range swells to cover such diverse instances as those of *symbol*, *rule*, *propensity*, and *law of nature*."

I strongly believe that the realization of this research program in Fernández's work may one day come to cement semiotics as the only truly interdisciplinary perspective, bridging the humanities and the natural sciences. This is perhaps best captured by Fernández's seminal notion of *semiotic causation* – introduced in this issue in the concluding paragraphs of "From tendencies to purposes." Here, Fernández presents semiosis as a kind of second order causation dependent upon ordinary physical (first order) causation. An expanded conception of habit as "the generalizing tendency itself" is central to this conception. As explained by Pearson: "Semiosis causes changes in the causal action itself. It alters the way that energy is channeled by acting on the habits embodied in the constraints that guide the flow of energy towards equilibrium" (2018: 401).

As ignored as semiotics is in the mainstream academic community, never, I think, has there been a time of more promise. The scaffolding is coming together; giants have laid the ground for this new science – venerable influences like Charls Pearson and Eliseo Fernández. May we climb on their shoulders.

² In an article entitled "Returning learning to education," to be published in an upcoming special issue of *Sign Systems Studies* called "Learning and adaptation" edited by Andrew Stables and Alin Olteanu, I develop the implications of such a *synechist* research program for ecological and educational conceptions alike, developing upon the work of both Pearson and Fernández.

Please enjoy these articles and stay tuned for what's to come.

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Bionote

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