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The cautionary tale of Peirce's logical interpretant

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Abstract: In 1904, Peirce described to Lady Welby a six-division typology composed of the sign, two objects, and a trio of interpretants for which he subsequently proposed numerous denominations. Of the three, the final interpretant was particularly problematic, and over the years Peirce experimented with at least eight different identifying terms such as “final,” “rational,” “normal,” “eventual,” etc. One group of interpretants is especially interesting as it only occurs in a single manuscript but has attracted considerable critical attention, namely the emotional, energetic, and logical interpretant series in a projected article of 1907. The paper examines the description of these, paying particular attention to the logical interpretant, and suggests how important aspects of the logic determining how Peirce defined them may have been neglected or ignored by researchers. It first shows how the group was presented, how the logical interpretant related to Peirce's purpose in the article, how it related to a restricted conception of the dynamic object in the manuscript, and explains through an analysis of its logical complications why Peirce was led to abandon it. These considerations suggest that much of the critical attention that the logical interpretant in particular has generated might be incomplete or, more seriously, nonsense.

Keywords: pragmatism; meaning; interpretation; logical interpretants; MS318

1 Introduction

Referenced by Peirce as “Pragmatism” or “Prag,” manuscript R318 in which this particular trio of interpretants, together with the innovative concept of semiosis, is to be found is composed of a series of variants of a projected article from 1907 in which Peirce proposed to present his personal conception of pragmatism. Published extracts are to be found in the *Collected Papers* (see especially CP: 5.467–496 and 5.464–466) and in *Essential Peirce Two* (Peirce 1998: 398–433). According to the editors, in its various versions and revisions, the article was submitted unsuccessfully to the *Nation* and to the *Atlantic Monthly* (Peirce 1998: 398). As a continuation of the

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conspicuous output of published papers and unpublished drafts produced during the previous two years, manuscript R318 is nevertheless testimony to the continuing influence of his early theoretical interest in “symbolistic,” of his lifelong preoccupation with the symbolic, conceptual elements of his theory of the sign and of his personal conception of pragmatism, defined thus in the manuscript: “It is merely a method of ascertaining the meaning of hard words and of abstract concepts. All pragmatists of whatever stripe will cordially assent to that statement” (R318: 15, 1907).¹ The manuscript is also very important for an understanding of the evolution of Peirce’s logic in that he develops many arguments illustrating what he refers to as the “action of the sign” and which he also terms “semeiosis” (R318: 55) or, as it is now known, “semiosis.”

The paper examines just two aspects of the pragmatism developed in the variants, namely the logical interpretant as presented in the manuscript, and its relation to the sign’s two objects. It first sets out the background to the version of pragmatism Peirce is seeking to have the reader understand. In view of arguments to be developed below, it is important, therefore, to bear in mind that the variants have to be seen as a series of unsuccessful and in certain cases widely differing attempts to formulate the specific nature of his now logic-based version of pragmatism in such a way that both the lay and the experienced reader might appreciate it: “The reader will please remember that proofs are forthcoming, on demand, of all the allegations I am about to make; but they are not suitable to this journal nor to this article, in which my only purpose is to explain in what pragmatism consists, not to prove it to be true” (R318: 251).

2 Symbolistic and pragmatism

What characterizes much of Peirce’s work in the 1905–1906 period leading to the statements in manuscript R318 is a return to the symbolistic of his earliest years, and to the idea that the symbol is the prime, albeit not the sole, subclass of signs that founds his conception of logic. This was how he initially conceived “semiotic” as the science of representations: “Logic is objective symbolistic. Symbolistic is the semiotic of symbols. Objective symbolistic is that branch of symbolistic which considers relations to objects. Semiotic is the science of representations” (W1: 303, 1865).

Within this group, his own interest consisted predominantly in objective symbolistic, the field which studies the relation between signs and their objects, this being, in fact, the basis of his first division of signs – likenesses, indices, and symbols

¹ As the contents of manuscript R318 are restricted to the year 1907, the date isn’t mentioned in further references. Pagination follows the manuscript described in the References section.

(EP1: 7, 1868) – the universally known division to which he returned many times over the years. As he states in his later *Ethics of Terminology*, which sets out basic principles framing the technical language to be employed in the composition of scientific reports, for example (EP2: 266, 1903), the symbol, the most complex type of sign, was the essential vehicle of scientific thought: “the woof and warp of all thought and all research is symbols, and the life of thought and science is the life inherent in symbols” (EP2: 219, 1903). However, in the 1905 *Monist* paper “What Pragmatism Is” Peirce was led to state that: “it must be admitted that pragmatism fails to furnish any translation or meaning of a proper name, or other designation of an individual object,” that “the pragmatic meaning is undoubtedly general; and it is equally indisputable that the general is of the nature of a word or sign” and that the “word ‘soldier’, whether spoken or written, is general in the same way; while the name, ‘George Washington,’ is not so” (EP2: 341–342, 1905). In short, pragmatism is a theory of meaning that is unavoidably restricted to the interpretation of the sorts of symbols on which Peirce had been working since his declaration of symbolistic in the mid-1860s. Consequently, a theory of this sort is inapplicable to the determination of the meaning of indices such as proper names, and, logically, to the determination of the meaning of icons, too. Thus, in pragmatism, Peirce’s particular vein of pragmatism, it follows that only symbols have meaning.² It was no doubt this theoretical preoccupation with the symbol that had an important influence on his “explanation” of pragmatism in manuscript R318 and on the way the logical interpretant in particular is presented there.

3 A profusion of interpretants

We turn now to manuscript R318. Pragmatism being a method of determining the meaning of hard words and concepts, at one point in the manuscript we find the following series of meanings, these being the bases of his numerous descriptions in R318 of the interpretants to which they correspond: “Thus there are emotional meanings, or meanings that are feelings; there are existential meanings, or actual things or events, whether physical or psychical resulting from the significance of signs; and conceptual or logical meanings” (R318: 397). The corresponding interpretants he introduces thus:

Philosophers find it needful to distinguish two “objects” of a sign; the object as the sign represents it and the object as it really is. In like manner, there are three “interpretants” or “meanings”; the meaning as explicitly set forth in the sign; the actual, real effect intended, and the ultimate logical consequences in view. Still finer distinctions are sometimes needed. (R318: 369)

² But symbols cannot function in logic alone, for as Peirce had determined explicitly in 1885 (see EP1: 225–228), an exhaustive theory of the symbol additionally requires indices and icons.

These meanings correspond to the three interpretants with which he is concerned in his demonstration of pragmatism: “It is now necessary to point out that there are three kinds of interpretant. Our categories suggest them, and the suggestion is confirmed by careful consideration. I term them the Emotional, the Energetic, and Logical Interpretants. They consist respectively in feelings, in efforts, and in habit-changes” (R318: 251). Now, one important point to note, one to which Peirce returns repeatedly in the variants, is the fact that he posits not one logical interpretant – the “ultimate logical consequences in view” referred to in the passage from R318 sequence 369 above – but at least three different kinds. However, the following are the only references to such logical interpretants to be found in the *Collected Papers*:

Every concept, every general proposition of the great edifice of science came to us as a conjecture. These ideas are the *first logical interpretants* of the phenomena that suggest them (CP: 5.480; R318: 85–87).

In the next step of thought, those first logical interpretants stimulate us to various voluntary performances in the inner world (CP: 5.481; R318: 91).

But as the ordinal in the two passages implies, there are likely to be more logical interpretants in other passages in Peirce’s various attempts to complete the article, and indeed elsewhere in the manuscript we find two kinds of second logical interpretants:

Concepts are mental habits; habits formed by exercise of the imagination. Human instinct is no whit ... come to define our conjectures more carefully, which may well be called the lower second logical interpretant. From this we are led on to note certain relations between modified conjectures which remain unchanged as long as certain restrictions are placed upon the modifications; and thus we are led to generalizations and to abstracting the forms of conjectures which (with much else,) will constitute the higher second logical interpretant. (R318: 505)

The second logical interpretants constitute the ultimate normal and proper mental effect of the sign taken by itself. (I do not mean removed from its context but considered apart from the effects of its context and circumstances of utterance.) They must, therefore, be identified with that “meaning” which we have all along been seeking. In that capacity, they are habits of internal or imaginary action ... (R318: 511).

To which we have to add three types of third logical interpretant:

The is [sic], it is true, a third logical interpretant, or rather, three such. These called into being when the activity passed [sic],³ under the influence of fatigue or of some other cause, from the theatre of internal experience to that of external experience ... External experience cannot be quite so voluntary; but the external experience which is consequent upon the production of the second (or, sometimes, directly upon that of the first) logical interpretant is sought and found by

3 Presumably Peirce means here “These are called into being when the activity has passed ...”. This is a manuscript, remember, and there are other such signs of haste throughout.

a deliberate, self-controlled, purposive, muscular effort. In a word, the performance is that of an *experiment*, or, at least, of a quasi-experiment, if I may be allowed to coin that word to signify that the second interpretants or parts of them, or associative or confirmatory, or may involve slight modifications of them (as, for example, by substituting one approximate value or valuation for another). In the third logical interpretant, or interpretants the work of the intellect comes to a demicadence, a provisional and partial consummation, so that it is of supreme logical importance. (R318: 509–515)⁴

What Peirce offers here is not the invariably single logical interpretant discussed in the philosophical literature, but six different varieties: one first logical interpretant, two second logical interpretants, a lower and a higher, plus three third logical interpretants, thus making six logical interpretants in all. He described the logical interpretant as “consisting in habit-changes,” and this array of first, second, and third logical interpretants is possibly an attempt to outline the different stages and circumstances determining the development of the habit-changes in question, since as we see below, only concepts have logical interpretants. No doubt serious researchers, once they have noticed the reference to the ordinal in the two references to a first logical interpretant in the *Collected Papers* (CP: 5.480–481), will have engaged with the original manuscript and discussed the whole series, for any work which dismisses the series or whose author is apparently unaware of it, is potentially incomplete or misleading.

Within the context of Peirce's personal conception of pragmatism, these are theoretically important statements, but such a profusion of interpretants must have worried the editors of the journals in which Peirce sought to publish his “explanation” of his method. It certainly failed to impress the editors of the *Collected Papers* since they declined to include, after the above references to first logical interpretants, any further material to justify the ordinality of the interpretant system variously outlined in the manuscript. That this complex system of logical interpretants is not mentioned at all in *Essential Peirce Two* suggests that the editors saw it as experimental and not worth bothering with, as nowhere else in the Peirce canon do we find the third of the standard three interpretants – the final – subjected to such a rigorous analysis. Nevertheless, although this complex combination of logical interpretants may seem experimental, it surely shows Peirce attempting to hypothesize in this particular variant of the projected article the logic-governed, nonpsychological stages in the interpretive side of semiosis leading to the establishment of a habit or of a habit-change. Peirce is clearly attempting to employ a highly specific part of his logic to explain pragmatism as a method for determining

⁴ See, too, for example: “Every concept, every general proposition of the great edifice of science came to us as a conjecture. These ideas are the first logical interpretants of the phenomena that suggest them” (R318: 85–87) and “In the next step of thought, those first logical interpretants stimulate us to various voluntary performances in the inner world” (R318: 91).

the meaning of hard words. For this reason alone, this interpretant system merits further investigation.⁵ However, there are other aspects of the three interpretants, of the logical in particular, which are more problematic and require attention.

4 Logical interpretants and signs without objects

Ever conscious of his future readers, Peirce illustrated the three different degrees of meaning of which the emotional, energetic, and logical interpretants were the exponents, respectively, by a piece of concerted music or an air played on a guitar, by various descriptions of the actions involved in a military command and by, for example, a linguistic concept such as the adjective *green*. One such illustration offers a cause for particular attention when dealing with the interpretants described in R318. Consider this description of one of the several versions of the military command “Ground arms!”, which identifies sign, object, and interpretant:

Suppose, for example, an officer of a squad or company of infantry gives the word of command, “Ground arms!”. This order is, of course, a sign. That thing which causes a sign as such is called the *object* (according to the usage of speech, the “real,” but more accurately, the *existent* object) represented by the sign: the sign is determined to some species of correspondence with that object. In the present case, the object the command represents is the will of the officer that the butts of the muskets be brought down to the ground. ... For the proper outcome of a sign, I propose the name, the interpretant of the sign. (R318: 51–55)

The actual sign as medium is the displacement of the air between officer and squad carrying the sounds of the command; the object is the will of the officer, a statement which in itself is highly innovative as it introduces intentionality – the officer’s will – as a trigger of the action of the sign and, finally, the interpretant, as we see below, is the crash of the musket butts being brought to the ground. We note, too, that Peirce offers “existent,” with all that the notion of existence implies, as a more appropriate

5 The “functioning” of the logical interpretant seems to exit the field of logic to enter that of the empirical since Peirce at one point introduces temporal considerations in the determination of meaning and habit: “It is not to be supposed that upon every presentation of a sign capable of producing a logical interpretant, such interpretant is actually produced. The occasion may either be too early or too late. If it is too early, the semiosis will not be carried so far, the other interpretants sufficing for the rude functions for which the sign is used. On the other hand, the occasion will come too late if the interpreter be already familiar with the logical interpretant, since then it will be recalled to his mind by a process which affords no hint of how it was originally produced. Moreover, the great majority of instances in which formations of logical interpretants do take place are very unsuitable to serve as illustrations of the process, because in them the essentials of this semiosis are buried in masses of accidental and hardly relevant semioses that are mixed with the former.” (R318: 121–123)

denomination of the real object, namely of what Peirce identified most often as the dynamic or dynamoid object. More surprising from the theoretical point of view is the following passage in a later variant in which Peirce returns to the example of the military command, describes the other interpretants and posits a “correspondence relation” – in itself a semiotically unusual dyadic concept in the circumstances – holding between object and interpretant as presented by each of the three types of signs introduced above:

But all logicians have distinguished two objects of a sign; the one, the Immediate object or object as the sign represents it (and without this sign would not be a sign); the other Real object, or object as it is independent of any particular idea representing it. Of course, many signs have no real objects. We turn to the interpretant, to see whether there is any corresponding distinction; and we find that in place of two, there are three different interpretants. First, there is the “emotional interpretant,” which consists in a feeling, or rather in the quality of a feeling. It is sometimes formed into an image, yet is more usually merely a feeling which causes the interpreter of the sign to believe he recognizes of [sic] the import and intention of the sign. A concerted piece of music, for example, brings a succession of musical emotions answering to those of the composer. This is an extreme case; usually the emotional interpretant consists merely in a sense, more or less complex, perhaps amounting to an image, perhaps not, of the meaning of the sign. All signs whatsoever must, in order to fulfil their functions as signs, first of all produce such emotional interpretants. Next, many signs bring about actual events. The infantry officer's word of command “Ground arms!” produces as its existential interpretant (the sign having been first apprehended in an “emotional interpretant”), the slamming down of the musket-butts. The less thought intervenes between the apprehension and this act, the better the sign fulfills its function. All signs that are not to evaporate in mere feelings must have such an existential interpretant, or as I might perhaps better have called it, such an energetic interpretant. These two interpretants correspond respectively to the two objects of a sign. The emotional interpretant, immediately produced by the sign, corresponds to the immediate object. The existential, or energetic, interpretant, corresponds to the real object whose action is obscurely and indirectly the active cause of the sign. But now there is a third interpretant, to which no object of the sign corresponds. It is what we commonly call the *meaning* of the sign; but I call it the logical interpretant, or logical meaning of the sign (R318: 373–379).

The relations described in the text can be summarized on Table 1, which displays the correspondence relation holding between object and interpretant characteristic of three types of signs, here a piece of concerted music – represented by the term “sonata” on Table 1 – a military command and the type of sign with which Peirce's symbol-based vein of pragmatism was principally concerned, the concept. According to the passage just quoted from R318, the sonata is typically a sign determined simply by an immediate object to produce an emotional interpretant and no other – it is a sign without a real, “existent” object as defined in the example above of the military command. The command, on the other hand, is a sign determined by both real, i.e., existent, and immediate objects to produce an emotional and an energetic interpretant but, surprisingly, since we know the verbal command can be translated, no

Table 1: Signs distributed according to the correspondence between object and interpretant in manuscript R318.

Object		Interpretant		
Real/existent	Immediate	Emotional <i>concept</i>	Energetic <i>concept</i>	Logical <i>concept</i>
<i>command</i>	<i>command</i> <i>sonata</i>	<i>command</i> <i>sonata</i>	<i>command</i>	

Source: R318: 373–379.

logical interpretant.⁶ The existential, deictic nature of the command and its incapacity to determine a logical interpretant is reminiscent of the remark in “What Pragmatism Is” in which Peirce declares that pragmatism cannot deal with, cannot translate, an index such as the proper noun *George Washington*, as it doesn’t have a meaning – identified in R318 as a logical interpretant – in the way that an intellectual concept such as *soldier* has. Finally, the concept, the principal preoccupation of pragmatism, by definition necessarily produces an emotional, an energetic, and a logical interpretant but, most strikingly Peirce asserts, corresponds to no object, a remark which, like the earlier reference to signs that have no real, i.e., dynamic, object, obviously invites comment.

Now, if we understand concepts to be the “many signs [that] have no real objects” mentioned in the passage – a legitimate surmise as Peirce later claims in the passage that there is no object of a sign to which any interpretant corresponds in the case of the concept – then the very concept of the sign itself becomes problematic within Peirce’s broader conception of logic as semeiotic, since, like the famous later “sop to Cerberus” definition from 1908,⁷ all available Peircean definitions of the sign state or imply that it participates in a genuine triadic relation within which it is determined by an object to produce an interpretant. The examples from the passage above appear to flout this fundamental principle, which raises questions concerning the theoretical status of the real object in this period, and, above all, of that of the logical interpretant. From the perspective of Peirce’s general logic, the statement that “there is a third interpretant, to which no object of the sign corresponds,” namely the logical interpretant that consists in the meaning of a sign such as the concept, seems highly problematic. A similar statement occurs in the selections of *Essential Peirce Two* in which Peirce again establishes correspondences between object and interpretant. One particular section is an assemblage of portions of what the editors identify as the

⁶ Cf., too, R318: 93.

⁷ “I define a Sign as anything which is so determined by something else, called its Object, and so determines an effect upon a person, which effect I call its Interpretant, that the latter is thereby mediately determined by the former” (SS: 80–81, 1908).

third version (Peirce 1998: 398) plus extracts from other variants in the manuscript. After having established correspondences between immediate object and emotional interpretant and between real object and energetic interpretant, we find the following statement:

But to our surprise, we find that the logical interpretant does not correspond with any kind of object. This defect of correspondence between object and interpretant must be rooted in the essential difference there is between the nature of an object that of an interpretant; which difference is that the former antecedes, while the latter succeeds the sign. The logical interpretant must, therefore, be in a relatively future tense. To this may be added the consideration that it is not all signs that have logical interpretants, but only intellectual concepts and the like; and these are all either general or intimately connected with generals, as it seems to me. (Peirce 1998: 410; R318: 645)

Peirce here, as in the long extract from the manuscript given above, states that the logical interpretant doesn't correspond with any object. However, we find no mention of the important point that many sign don't have *real* objects, which invites us briefly to consider the sign itself. Although the concept as placed on Table 1 is not mentioned in the passage above (R318: 373–379), we know from remarks elsewhere in the manuscript that it is only the concept that has intellectual, or logical meaning, and therefore is the only sign to have a logical interpretant in Peirce's complex account of interpretation in 1907:

In the order "Ground arms!" the object, which is the next instant of time, is expressed by the attitude of the officer, the way he carries his sword, and so forth. If the bare word "green" really conveys any idea, it is of something visible. For the object is the antecedent of the meaning. As I said above, the object is the idea or thing that the sign finds, the meaning what [sic] it leaves. The immediate object resembles the emotional meaning in being common to all signs and also in being subjective. The real object corresponds to the existential meaning very obviously. Plainly, the reason for there being a third meaning but no third object must be grounded in the essential difference between the relations of the two correlates of the sign. The object is antecedent, the meaning subsequent to the sign. That third meaning, therefore, must be in some sort of future tense.

To this may be added the consideration that it is not all signs that have a logical meaning, but only intellectual concepts, which are all general, or else intimately dependent upon a general. (R318: 677–679)

Thus, these intellectual concepts are the only signs to have logical interpretants or meanings, and we have encountered the assertion that there is no third object to which, in such signs, they might "correspond." As Peirce states, "all logicians have distinguished two objects of a sign"; therefore, the number of objects engaged in any action of the sign is given by the logical tradition. The three interpretants, as seen earlier, are suggested by the categories (R318: 251). There is no problem with the ratio of objects to interpretants mentioned in the passage if we were considering semiosis.

However, according to Peirce in this manuscript, logical interpretants cannot correspond to a second, real, i.e., existent object. While the logic governing the absence of a third object of a sign as advanced in the passage just quoted (R318: 677–679; cf., too, 407–409) is perfectly clear – explicitly since 1904 and certainly before, signs have been defined to have only two objects, a dynamic and an immediate – it remains to explain why Peirce should seriously suggest that there should be a kind of sign without an object.

The reason for this surprising introduction of an objectless sign suggests itself in the terminology that Peirce uses in the “Ground arms!” example and elsewhere to characterize the real object: by the term “real” we are to understand “existent,” yielding an object which is “according to the usage of speech, the “real,” but more accurately, the *existent* object.” In the longer passage above (R318: 373–379), the energetic interpretant, which is an actual, existent event, corresponds to, is determined by, a real, i.e., existent, object. We are to understand, therefore, that Peirce has restricted the scope of the object in this case to existent status and uses this to explain why an intellectual concept, a logical interpret characterized by a more complex mode of being, generality, can have no corresponding less complex object. In the system of correspondences summarized on Table 1, the military command belongs to the kind of sign determined by a real object “whose action is obscurely, and indirectly the active cause of the sign”; in short by an object whose mode of being is defined to be that of existence, actuality. In the case of the intellectual sign, i.e., the concept, the logical interpretant would require to correspond to a general, *unperceivable* object such as a class, or one that would determine a legisign, a rule or some general regulatory principle characterized by Thirdness, for example, an object that is in some way real but not existent. One possible explanation is offered by Peirce’s conception of perception and by the way in which we recognize signs. Appropriately, Peirce states in R318 that the generality of meaning – significance – and signs, the meaning provided by the logical interpretant, is not given in perception but can only be identified by inference:

If ... someone had asked me to guess in how many unrelated ways a sign could first come to be recognized as such the right answer is, By one only ... namely, By inference. For decidedly, significance can neither be seen, nor heard, nor smelled, nor tasted, nor known by touch, nor otherwise be directly perceived; and that which cannot be directly perceived can only become known by inference. (R318: 345–347)

Whereas a real, existent object is necessarily perceivable and can provoke some sort of similarly existent event such as the slamming down of musket butts, such possibilities are unavailable to a general object. Hence, the assertion that there are many signs that have no real, i.e., existent object and that “there is a third interpretant, to which no object of the sign exists.” It seems a difficult position for Peirce to maintain

with respect to what might be considered as his “mainstream” general logic, the logic as semeiotic, more especially as it is precisely in MS318 that he defines semiosis, that is, the processual action of the sign. But in these versions, his purpose lies outside the strict remit of his previous work on signs, and outside of that to come. His preoccupation, as can be seen on Table 1 and in the long quotation given above, is less with signs than with the demonstration of his pragmatism, and this deals simply with the meaning of concepts presented with respect to the relation between two objects and three interpretants. The actual concrete functioning of semiosis, although mentioned in the variants, is of minor interest in the context of a search for a method of establishing the meaning of the hard words and concepts in the definition. This search leads Peirce to explain the reasons for the unequal distribution of two objects and three interpretants. Although given by the categories, there have to be three interpretants in order to account for the fact that generality can be inferred independently of existent, *real* perceptual data. This means that the explanation of pragmatism, a theory of interpretation, is only indirectly related to the general logic, even though he specifically associates the objectless logical interpretant with the process of semiosis: “Yet this does not quite tell us just what the nature is of the essential effect upon the interpreter, brought about by the *sēmīō’sis* of the sign, which constitutes the logical interpretant” (R318: 99).

Whether because of repeated failure to have his article published or through the desire to return to the investigation of the sign and classes thereof, within a year Peirce had abandoned this particular pragmatism project and had resumed the more generally recognizably Peircean preoccupation with three-way classifications of signs. Consider Table 2, constructed from a draft of 25 December 1908 intended for Lady Welby, on which the labels **S**, **O_i**, **O_d**, **I_i**, **I_d**, and **I_f** represent, respectively, the sign, the immediate object, the dynamic object, the immediate interpretant, the dynamic interpretant, and the final interpretant. Table 2 sets out signs identified according to the possible, existent or necessitant nature of the sign, the two objects and three interpretants as correlates and according to the “ontological”⁸ relation holding between the sign and the dynamic object, and between the sign and the dynamic and the final interpretants. Table 2 is an actual classification of signs proposed by Peirce, while the passage represented by Table 1 reads as a classification of object-interpretant correspondences.

With respect to Table 2, there are notable differences between the logic as semeiotic and the explanation of pragmatism offered in R318. First, the concept itself becomes the semantically less descriptive “type”; there are necessary differences

⁸ “Ontological” because Peirce referred to the three universes of possible, existent and necessitant entities, which became the discriminants in his classifications of signs in 1908 as “universes of existence,” “which are distinguished by three Modalities of Being” (SS: 81, 1908).

Table 2: Table of ten divisions of signs from a draft intended for Lady Welby, 25 December 1908.

	Universe		
	Possible	Existent	Necessitant
Respect:			
S	potisign	actisign	famisign
Oi	descriptive	designative	copulant
Od	abstractive	concretive	collective
S-Od	icon	index	symbol
Ii	hypothetical	categorical	relative
Id	sympathetic	percussive	usual
S-Id	suggestive	imperative	indicative
If	gratific	to produce action	to produce self-control
S-If	seme	pheme	delome
S, O, I	assurance by instinct	assurance by experience	assurance by form

Source: EP2: 483–490

between, respectively, the immediate, dynamic, and final interpretant divisions on the table and the emotional, energetic, and final interpretants from 1907, since these are the only correlate interpretant divisions available on the table (the others stand in relations with the sign). Indeed, with the long extract above from R318 (373–379) in mind, it is possible to see on Table 2 how Peirce’s thinking on signs returned to the approach developed in the years between 1903 and 1907, as it is clear from entry eight on the table, where the respect or subject for the division is the final interpretant (**If**), that the classes of signs there identified correspond, in order of increasing complexity, to a quality of feeling (a gratific sign), to an action or, in the most complex case, to a habit or habit-change (“to produce self-control”), these bearing a close resemblance, respectively, to the emotional, existential, and conceptual meanings described in R318. However, within this more conventionally Peircean type of classification all three correlates, the object included, can be possible, existent, and necessitant, and the objects here are no longer restricted to immediacy and existence as had necessarily been the case in manuscript R318, where he was attempting to explain why the generality of meaning cannot be derived from existent individual, fact or event.

The information supplied by Table 2 suggests that the focus of Peirce’s attention had now reverted from the pragmatism and pursuit of meaning developed in manuscript R318 to a renewed interest in classes of *signs* and in the way signs can be identified with respect to their objects and interpretants, and that the logical interpretant of 1907 which had no object had been abandoned and replaced by renewed interest in interpretants identified with respect to the signs that provoke them rather

than in interpretants organized according to the objects to which they might correspond. Indeed, the notion of complex signs having no real, existential object became theoretically and functionally superfluous with the arrival of the 1908 description of the action of the sign in the letter to Lady Welby dated 23 December 1908 in a new combined six- and ten-division classification of signs (SS: 81–84, 1908). The initial hexad consisted in a sequence of five supplementary correlate divisions in addition to that of the sign, a process-like sequence initiated by the dynamic object and terminating with the final interpretant – in itself a typology capable of yielding twenty-eight classes of signs and in an order which corresponds, in an expanded state, to the numerous general definitions of the sign – to which Peirce added four relational divisions involving sign and object and sign and interpretant (obviously a very different ordering of divisions from the one established on Table 2). The fate of the emotional, energetic, and logical interpretants, which were distinguished according to the nature of the object to which they might or might not correspond, was sealed once Peirce had set up his system of three universes – possible, existent, and necessitant – to which all six correlates and the four relational divisions could belong. In this system, the two objects themselves could be necessitant, i.e., belong to a universe more complex than existence:

I recognize three Universes, which are distinguished by three Modalities of Being. One of these Universes embraces whatever has its Being in itself alone ... I denominate the objects of this Universe *Ideas*, or *Possibles*, although the latter designation does not imply capability of actualization ... Another Universe is that of, 1st, Objects whose Being consists in their Brute reactions, and of, 2nd, the Facts I call the Objects, Things, or more unambiguously, *Existents*, and the facts about them I call Facts ... The third Universe consists of the co-being of whatever is in its Nature *necessitant*, that is, is a Habit, a law, or something expressible in a universal proposition. Especially continua are of this nature. I call objects of this universe *Necessitants*. (SS: 80–82, 1908)

5 Discussion and conclusion

In manuscript R318, Peirce was clearly trying to explain his pragmatism by means of a development of one specific branch of his logic: interpretation. As he was attempting to demonstrate a method of determining the meaning of hard words and concepts, he was especially interested in establishing a theoretically viable and logically valid theory of interpretation as an explanation of *how* the comprehension of hard words develops. This was supplied by the new approach to the conventional trio of interpretants, of which the logical, which had no singular correspondence with the world of existence, was by definition the most appropriate. The paper

suggests that the complex system of six logical interpretants offered Peirce the theoretical possibility of working through the *interpretive* stages of semiosis by means of which the habitual interpretation of the meaning of a concept – the sign with which pragmatism was principally concerned – might be achieved.

However, in his discussion of actual examples of signs, he came to posit that the concept couldn't have a real object, whereby by "real" he clearly meant an existent object such as an individual, event or fact. The only object that a concept could possibly have would have to be general, namely an unperceivable class as opposed to an actual fact, event or physical entity. Justifying the principle that a third interpretant could have no real object was the basis of his explanation of his pragmatism in the various versions of the projected article. Like the earlier example of the term *soldier*, only symbolic entities such as the concept could have meaning. This was a variation on the "sense and reference" distinction – deictics such as *George Washington* and the military command had "referents", had a denotation in the world of existents but no logical meaning, whereas the concept had meaning, "sense", but no concrete referent or denotation. The logical interpretant was in a "relatively future tense" as it was a future habit: "Consequently, the most perfect account of a concept that words can convey will consist in the habit which that concept is calculated to produce. But how otherwise can a habit be described than by a description of the kind of action to which it gives rise, with a specification of the conditions and of the motive?" (R318: 155–157). No doubt, in view of his many previous statements associating Thirdness with sign, object, and interpretant, he must have realized that to maintain that there could be a class of signs such as the concept producing all three interpretants but for which there is no corresponding determining object *in actual cases of semiosis* would have resulted in confusion, or worse, in aporia: the logical interpretant is incompatible with semiosis. For that reason and, presumably, for others mentioned in the paper, Peirce never again referred to a logical interpretant, or to either of the other two. As we know, no version of the article was accepted for publication and Peirce, by the end of the following year, had returned to earlier considerations concerning sign, classification, and the action of the sign.

Thus, the fate of the logical interpretant presents us with a cautionary tale for Peirce-based research, for there is absolutely no reference in the *Collected Papers*, in *Essential Peirce Two* or in the entry for manuscript R318 in the Robin catalogue to all six logical interpretants discussed above,⁹ or to signs without real objects or, with the exception of *Essential Peirce Two*, to logical interpretants to which no object corresponds, interpretant features that are incompatible with the a fully functional semiosis. Both published works are *selections* based on editorial decisions, the necessarily idiosyncratic choices and preferences of their editors, and are extracted

9 Robin, for one, does refer to "different units of interpretants" but goes no further.

from manuscripts or parts of manuscripts such as R318. They cannot possibly reflect the entirety of Peirce's voluminous notes and manuscripts, especially one the size of R318. This has serious implications for the sorts of research projects that might be undertaken by Peirce scholars on, for example, Peirce's justification of the "objectless" logical interpretant in particular and on interpretants and interpretation in general. The unwary researcher who has not engaged with the original statements in the manuscript or who is content to take the short cut through the abovementioned selections or who relies solely on secondary sources, and sees the logical system described in the manuscript as simply another version of the general logic, is in peril of producing an incomplete study, or more seriously, a piece of nonsense.

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- The text uses the pagination of the Harvard version of the largely unpublished Peirce manuscript MS318. Almost 700 recto/verso sheets long, it is identified according to the standard Richard Robin catalogue entry. It is thus referenced by the letter R immediately followed by the manuscript number, sheet number and year, e.g., (R318: 369, 1907). The Houghton Library in Cambridge, Ma., which holds these manuscripts, has made many of them available in digital form for research purposes, the URL for MS318 being [https://iif.lib.harvard.edu/manifests/view/drs:48987092\\$1i](https://iif.lib.harvard.edu/manifests/view/drs:48987092$1i). The call number for the entire collection of Charles S. Peirce papers is MS Am 1632, consequently each citation in the text is to be understood as, e.g., (MS Am 1632, R318: 369, 1907).

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