Peirce's contribution to understanding thought, rhetoric, and communication with others

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Abstract:

[EN] In "Speaking into the Air, the author John Durhan Peters " (1999) depicts how the idea of communication was developed in History, and rhetoric and communication are two keywords that could be regularly associated. They include the possibility of sharing meanings on human reality and Nature, between sciences and ordinary life. In the end of his book, Peters makes an important consideration on Peirce's work, showing how the American pragmatism contributes to a non- anthropocentric understanding of communication. The thinker being statement is an important stage of the Renaissance Era, but the value of human thinking must be reconnected with nature, acknowledging it not only as an object, but also as an inherent aspect. Talking about the concepts of "dialogue" and "dissemination", Peters raises two main communication comprehension tendencies since ancient times. One as an embodied experience of the human being, and other as media contacts with the subjects. In the Middle Age, with society plunged into the Christian religion culture, depictions of angels were a metaphor to the attempts of contact with disembodied beings. The development of new technologies since the Renaissance allowed, gradually, the merging of this spiritual desire with a materialistic concretization of the communicative aims. The relationship of John Locke's thoughts with the Descartes paradigm accuses an anthropologic perspective, pursuing a conventional agreement between individuals, which Peirce would consider in a non-anthropocentric semiotics.

Keywords: *Communication theory, Non-anthropocentric semiotics, Dialogue and Dissemination, American Pragmatism, Rhetoric and Media*

0. Introduction

The work of Charles Sanders Peirce deserves greater attention, particularly for his approach to explaining thought through pragmatism in a way that is not human-centered. He also offers a distinct perspective on rhetoric and communication, proposing that otherness, from a semiotic standpoint, encompasses any kind of mind. It is important to note that some authors do not reference Peirce, arguing that we live in a different era, one in which the environment has generated numerous signs of change. This is the case with BRUNO LATOUR (2019). In his book *Nous n'avons jamais été modernes*, Latour examines the relationship between nature and modern society in the production of science and meaning, yet he does not mention Peirce. Thinkers such as Jürgen Habermas tend to define communication primarily as a human activity. In contrast, Peirce provides a framework for considering not only communication but also rhetoric beyond an exclusively anthropocentric perspective. Although rhetoric was not Peirce's primary concern, his writings on semiotics offer the possibility of reinterpreting rhetoric in a way that is not limited to an anthropological understanding.

JOHN DURHAM PETERS, in his book *Speaking into the Air* (1999), reflects on communication across different historical periods, centering his analysis on the key concepts of "dialogue" and "dissemination." These terms serve as fundamental keywords that shape the understanding of communication as an activity. The technical and material interactions between beings are examined in relation to Peirce's work, highlighting his continued relevance today. It is particularly important to consider the issues that PETERS (2009) raises regarding communication in relation to Peirce's pragmatism and his understanding of semiosis. Peters explores concepts such as "dialogue," "dissemination," and "solipsism," referencing thinkers like John Locke and Hegel. Notably, Peirce's contribution lies in his notion of "continuity," which frames human beings as signs among other signs in an ongoing communicative process.

1. Reflections on Communication

PETERS (1999) examines how the concept of communication has developed throughout history. In the early chapters of his book, references to the pragmatist Charles Sanders Peirce (1839–1914) are not particularly prominent. However, toward the end, Peters gives Peirce significant attention, exploring the historical context in which his thought emerged as a tribute to American pragmatists. Peters highlights "dialogue" and "dissemination" as key concepts in the historical evolution of communication, emphasizing the role of John Locke (1632–1704) in shaping these ideas in the 17th century—before the rise of pragmatism and its considerations on semiotics and communication.

Rhetoric and communication encompass the sharing of meaning between human reality and nature, bridging the sciences and everyday life. At the conclusion of his book, PETERS makes an important observation about Peirce's work, illustrating how American pragmatism contributes to a non-anthropocentric understanding of communication.

PETERS' historical reconstruction reveals how cultural imaginaries have been structured—something evident in contemporary media representation, which, in turn, shapes theoretical approaches to communication. Rhetoric and communication are closely linked concepts, and the author notes that in classical rhetoric, the term *communicatio* referred to a stylistic device in which the speaker simulated a dialogue. The idea of communication as an exchange between interiorities gained prominence in the 19th century, but as CHARLES HORTON COOLEY observed in the early 20th century, communication is *"the mechanism through which human relations develop"* (COOLEY in PETERS 1999: 9). PETERS understands communication as *"the project of reconciling self and other."* He further argues: *"The mistake is to think that communications will solve the problem of communication, that better wiring will eliminate the ghosts"* (PETERS 1999: 9). Ultimately, he sees the human condition as inherently tied to *logos* and communication.

2. Peirce and Rhetoric

The relationship between rhetoric and communication, as well as between logic and rhetoric, is complex, as there are many affinities between them. Peirce's work provides valuable insights into these questions. VINCENT COLAPIETRO, in his essay *"C. S. Peirce's Rhetorical Turn"* (2007), acknowledges that the American pragmatist reflected on the meaning of rhetoric toward the end of his career. In Peirce's semiotic theory, signs function as elements of both logic and communication. However, symbols, as a particular kind of sign, serve the purposes of both rhetoric and logic. Signs possess the power to influence agents, shape agency, and reinforce corresponding beliefs. Although philosophy has historically distinguished itself from sophistic rhetoric, Peirce was interested in "re-founding the study of rhetoric as an integral and ultimately integrating part of his semeiotic" (COLAPIETRO 2007: 23).

Understanding meaning as a system of various types of signs allows us to recognize the relationship between nature, human life, and science as a process of communication between beings or minds through signs. COLAPIETRO interprets Peirce's rhetorical inquiry as an investigation into "any usage of signs over which self-control is in some measure possible—how to render signs efficacious or effective, and also fruitful or fecund" (COLAPIETRO 2007: 27). He argues that, for Peirce, rhetoric is closely related to communication through its concern with the efficacy of signs. In Peirce's pragmatist perspective, rhetoric involves self-criticism and self-control rather than mere persuasion. This perspective echoes an inclination seen in Aristotle, who emphasized the relationship between discourse and ethics, asserting that the first form of persuasion depends on the moral character of the speaker (ARISTOTELES 2015). For Peirce, this ethical dimension is strongly linked to a commitment to logic and the pursuit of better understanding. Inspired by Kenneth Burke, COLAPIETRO underscores that "rhetoric in the Peircean sense is concerned as much with identity as with communication. Identity itself, however, must be linked to those discursive and other processes of identification through which the self-understanding of self-critical agents is formed, solidified, and indeed transformed" (COLAPIETRO 2007: 31).

KENNETH BURKE (1969) proposes "identification" as the central concept of rhetoric, replacing the traditional emphasis on "persuasion," thereby developing a "philosophy of rhetoric." Reflecting on communication in the aftermath of World War II, Burke explores the motives behind rhetoric and the various ways in which identification occurs, considering its manifestations across art, science, magic, and religion within specific historical contexts. Strategies of identification shape how knowledge is expressed in social contexts and how speakers/writers and listeners/readers understand themselves—both as individuals and as members of a collective.

3. Rhetoric and Communication

The concept of rhetoric has traditionally been framed in terms of persuasion. However, persuasion relies on the recognition of the speaker's virtues, which, in turn, involves a process of identification that raises ethical concerns. This relationship of otherness is at the core of the communication problem that PETERS (1999) explores throughout his book. He examines various forms of dialogue, from Socratic dialogues as a model of physical presence to the dissemination of biblical texts and their hermeneutical implications. He also considers angels as messengers between Heaven and Earth, philosophers identifying communication as a fundamental human problem, money as a symbol of material relationships, and electricity as a metaphor for communication. Additionally, he touches on telepathy, spiritualism, science fiction, and communication with animals and other beings, demonstrating the vast scope of communication studies.

The problem of communication has gained increasing relevance over the past two centuries, particularly due to the rise of its counterpart—solipsism. Mass communication, much like the circus spectacles of ancient Rome or persuasive rhetorical strategies, often involves fabricating identification with the receiver, reader, or listener to shape public behavior. The concept of information is closely tied to the development of new technologies, such as the telephone, while communication has increasingly been understood in

terms of data transmission across distances. PETERS (1999) highlights a crucial issue: the inherent impossibility of fully sharing information between human minds. This notion aligns with William James' argument in *Principles of Psychology* (1890), where he emphasizes the limitations of direct cognitive exchange.

Regarding the concepts of "dialogue" and "dissemination," PETERS (1999) identifies two fundamental tendencies in the understanding of communication since ancient times. The first views communication as an embodied experience between human beings, while the second considers it as a process mediated by texts and other forms of media.

In the dialogue *Phaedrus*, Socrates emphasizes the importance of oral speech as a form of conversation. Advocating for the necessity of knowing others, he compares speech to a seed that must be cultivated between interlocutors. His concern with written texts lies in their potential for misinterpretation, as they lack the interactive element that enables clarification and deeper understanding. For Socrates, rhetorical concerns are primarily about understanding the other and ensuring that speech is conveyed in a way that fosters meaningful dialogue.

On the other hand, dissemination represents another model of communication, exemplified by the spread of biblical texts. Unlike Socratic dialogue, dissemination prioritizes the wide distribution of sacred texts to a heterogeneous audience, even when the relationship between sender and receiver is asymmetrical. While Socrates envisions dialogue as a symmetrical exchange between two souls, the communicative structure of dissemination places the responsibility of interpretation on the receiver. In this model, transmission is uniform, but reception is diverse. The meaning of the message is not fixed; rather, it requires active engagement from the audience, much like how parables invite interpretation.

The author references additional ancient sources in the chapter *The Spiritualist Tradition* to explore the concept of communication. In this context, PETERS (1999) examines the notion of "sign" in the writings of Saint Augustine (354–430). The medieval thinker conceptualizes the interiority of the self and the

sign as an empty vessel to be filled with ideational content (PETERS 1999: 63–64). In this framework, signs serve as expressions of inner life.

Saint Augustine's thought introduces the concept of the sign as a medium. For him, "the sound of a word is material; the significance of a word is mental" (PETERS 1999: 70). His work establishes several key binary oppositions, such as soul and body, intellect and sense, eternity and time, and inside and outside. He conceives the notion of the interior self, defining communication as the process that makes the self accessible to others (PETERS 1999: 68). Moreover, Augustine suggests that communication without words represents an aspiration for humans, as spiritual revelation is considered superior to audiovisual stimulation (PETERS 1999: 71).

During the Middle Ages, when Christian culture dominated Western society, angelic depictions emerged as metaphors for communication with disembodied beings. Angels, present in the Western imagination since ancient Greece, came to symbolize immaterial communication or a sacred embodiment of love, beyond sex and gender, particularly in medieval thought. "Since Augustine at least, angels have been the epitome of perfect communication, a model of how we would talk if we had no obstructions" (PETERS 1999: 75–76).

The technological advancements of the Renaissance gradually merged this spiritual aspiration with a materialist understanding of communication. By the seventeenth century, the term "communication" had acquired a new meaning in modern English, reflecting experiments and debates on magnetism, gravitation, and the transmission of thought. The concept increasingly described action at a distance. Newton, for example, hypothesized that gravity traveled through an "imponderable" or insensible fluid, which he called a medium—a term imbued with spiritual as well as physical connotations (PETERS 1999: 80).

As PETERS (1999) suggests, the writings of Saint Augustine and John Locke, along with spiritualist traditions such as mesmerism and psychical research, have all shaped contemporary understandings of communication. While the Renaissance elevated human thought as central to knowledge, Peters argues that Peirce's key contribution was his insistence that thinking must reconnect with nature, recognizing it not

merely as an object but as an inherent part of the communicative process.

4. Locke: Steps Toward Semiotics

The British empiricist philosopher John Locke plays a significant role in PETERS' work, not only because he lived in the 17th century—after the emergence of modern scientific ideas—but also because communication occupies a central place in his philosophy. As an empiricist, Locke emphasized the importance of perception in understanding reality, yet he did not fully grasp the role of others in human thought. His alignment with Descartes paradigm reflects an anthropocentric perspective, seeking a conventional agreement between individuals—an approach that Peirce would later challenge with his non-anthropocentric semiotics.

John Locke (1632–1704) was shaped by the cultural context of individualism and viewed communication as the exchange of independently formed ideas between individuals. According to PETERS (1999), "Locke understood communication not as a kind of speech, rhetoric, or discourse, but as their ideal and result." PETERS further observes that "Locke treats the meanings of words as a sort of private property in the individual's interior. [...] [For Locke, the] individual (and not society, language, or tradition) is the master of meaning, which makes common understanding between individuals both desperately urgent and highly problematic" (PETERS 1999: 81).

Using the word "idea" as "the basic currency of his epistemology", Locke shared the Cartesian notion that "we have no direct access to the real world" (PETERS 1999: 82). According to this perspective, the meaning of words is based on their "reference to ideas in minds" (PETERS 1999: 84). In this way, language functions as a medium for transporting and transmitting ideas. Locke's alignment with Descartes' paradigm reinforces an anthropocentric perspective, in which meaning is produced solely by human beings, in their individuality. Since meaning, in Locke's view, is formed within the individual mind, the central challenge becomes how meaning can be effectively shared.

In *Panorama da Semiótica* (1995), WINFRIED NÖTH reflects on Locke's role as the leading semiotic thinker of his time. However, NÖTH notes that, for Locke, signs are merely ideas in the individual mind, derived from the perception of external objects. Thus, words or signs are understood as mental representations within a singular mind, rather than constructions shaped through shared experience or embedded within a broader system of thought, knowledge, or language. In contrast, the Swiss linguist, Ferdinand de Saussure conceptualized signs as components of a structured linguistic system, while Charles Sanders Peirce approached signs through the philosophical lens of synechism, emphasizing the principle of continuity in meaning and interpretation.

5. Locke's Rhetorical Goals

John Locke made significant contributions to various fields, including philosophy, science, politics, and semiotics. While he was ahead of his time, he was also a product of it. Despite Peters' (1999) statement that Locke did not understand communication as rhetoric, it is possible to interpret his reflections in *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (LOCKE 1999/1690) as having a rhetorical goal. His concerns about the ethics of knowledge are similar to Peirce's thoughts on rhetoric. In Book III – Of Words, LOCKE primarily discusses the misuse of language in philosophy and science.

Among LOCKE's reflections, we find considerations that today can be identified with the three aspects of the sign later defined by Peirce: the sign, the object, and the interpretant. This is the Peircean consecrated definition: Peirce described the sign as something that relates to an "object" under some aspect, producing an interpretant in some mind. These three elements are interconnected (DELEDALLE 1990: 137). Locke's reflections can be analyzed within this framework. As he explores how ideas in the human mind can be communicated ethically, he emphasizes the dimensions of the "sign" and "interpretant". The empirical foundation of his work should focus on the question of the "object". However, when discussing words, LOCKE indirectly

highlights the semiotic dimension of signs, which is essential to thought, rhetoric, knowledge, and its dissemination. Thus, he underscores the role of language while not fully considering the social dimension of communication, as Peters points out. LOCKE acknowledges that the individual is shaped by language and environment, yet he insists that the main concern is how the subject uses words to share knowledge. He accepts the impossibility of knowing real essences, including those of nature, but he does not regard objects as active agents in the process of human thought. In a way, Locke's reflections on words raise fundamental questions: Do we live among signs or among objects? How should we use signs ethically?

At times, LOCKE acknowledges the social dimension of language, recognizing that its primary purpose is communication. However, he ultimately views the use of words as an individual responsibility, rather than considering individuals as shaped by social and historical contexts. This perspective likely represents an early step toward the sociological studies that would emerge in the 19th century, when Peirce was born and engaged in scientific discourse.

However, PETERS (1999) emphasizes that Locke's ideas remain deeply embedded in 19th-century thought. Mesmerism, associated with Franz Anton Mesmer (1794–1815), is closely tied to the romantic ideas of that period. However, it also reflects the individualistic views of John Locke in the 17th century, as well as the democratic spirit of the French Revolution, which championed the power of the spirit and body against tyranny. Mesmerist experiences paved the way for studies on the unconscious, hypnosis (a concept that emerged in the 1840s), and neurosis. As PETERS (1999: 89) notes, "Mesmerism played out some of the cultural consequences of Locke's semantic individualism." He further explains that "[The] antinomies – the self as sovereignly shut or dangerously open – were set up by Locke" (PETERS 1999: 90) and that "[Mesmerism] supplies romanticism with much of its imagery of love and possession [or seduction]" (PETERS 1999: 91). He continues, "Mesmerism fit the nascent democratic sentiments of its age, showing how each person possessed a power given by nature that could not be removed by despotism or tyranny" (PETERS 1999: 92).

PETERS (1999) acknowledges Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770–1831)

as both the last thinker of the Cartesian cogito and the first thinker of otherness. The German philosopher situates "Spirit" "at the center of communication," yet it remains "embodied and tragically conflicted" (PETERS 1999: 109). The term "phenomenology" was new in Hegel's time. Peters demonstrates how Hegel transcends the spiritualist perspective, proposing an essential connection between spirit and body. This shift creates a new framework for understanding communication and lays the groundwork for Peircean thought. Peirce viewed Hegel's legacy primarily in logical terms and aspired to construct a philosophical system akin to those of Aristotle, Kant, and Hegel. However, as a pragmatist, his principal critique targeted Hegel's idealism.

According to PETERS (1999), rather than advocating for a fusion of subjects, Hegel contends that historical relations enable subjectivity. Consequently, all things can be understood as part of a larger organization. The spirit is intrinsically linked to its manifestation in the world. Hegel recognizes political and historical contexts as essential conditions for recognition and reciprocity among individuals. The self exists only in relation to the other. As he asserts, "Self-consciousness achieves its satisfaction only in another self-consciousness" (HEGEL in PETERS 1999: 112). For Hegel, the spirit exists within a community, and self-discovery occurs through communal life. Subjectivity becomes explicit only when another acknowledges it. Yet, paradoxically, the self does not fully comprehend its own interiority.

The author examines how the self is understood from a Hegelian perspective:

> "I do not know in detail how I appear in public, how others take me, how my actions resound in the world, even what my quirks and mannerisms are. My self, so plainly revealed to others, is largely opaque to me. My private self is obscure to you, but my public self is obscure to me. […] My private self, therefore, is also obscure to me, since it is made out of public materials. I have to rely on others for self-knowledge." (PETERS, 1999, p. 114)

It is possible to observe a connection between Peircean and Hegelian concepts. In *Peirce's Approach to the Self*, VINCENT COLAPIETRO (1989) analyzes several of Peirce's texts and explains that, for Peirce, the *self* is a sign that

produces actions in relation to other signs.

"The subject in its innermost being is itself a form of semiosis. [...] The most basic fact about the human person is that he or she is a being in communication with other beings or, more accurately, a being who possesses the capacity to be in communication with others." (COLAPIETRO, 1989: 37)

PETERS (1999) argues that Hegel perceives the *spirit* in cultural forms—art, religion, and philosophy—as materialized in texts, communities, sculptures, paintings, and language. However, this embodiment holds no significance without recognition, which depends on interpretation and the production of meaning. "Whereas Locke asserts that meanings are in people, Hegel argues [for] the worldliness, the objectivity, of meanings" (PETERS, 1999: 116).

Despite Socrates' concerns regarding the written text, for Hegel, writing is the medium that unites all other media of his time. Peters asserts: "the interaction of text and reader" could serve as "the model of communication in general" (PETERS, 1999: 118). He continues: "To live is to leave traces. To speak to another is to produce signs that are independent of one's soul and are interpreted without one's control." (PETERS, 1999: 118). Like Hegel— and in contrast to Locke—Peters notes that Karl Marx (1818–1883) regards *individuality* not as a *starting point* but as "the result of a collective human life" (PETERS, 1999: 119).

6. Otherness in the Past and a Different Context

PETERS (1999) suggests that the concept of communication emerged within the British context, where people sought contact with both the distant and the dead. Unlike today, where cremation has become a sanitized and private process, past societies actively celebrated the dead, integrating them into daily life. In PETERS' analysis, modern media make it increasingly difficult to distinguish between individuals. He observes: "Communication with the dead is the paradigm case of hermeneutics: the art of interpretation where

no return message can be received" (PETERS, 1999: 149). For the author, hermeneutics applies to texts when there is a temporal or cultural distance between writer and reader, requiring interpretation to bridge the gap.

Tracing the philosophical inquiry into *the other* since Hegel and the challenges of establishing communication, PETERS (1999) emphasizes a crucial point: the difference—or relationship—between cultures. He writes: "The key question for twentieth-century communication theory – a question at once philosophical, moral, and political – is how wide and deep our empathy for otherness can reach, how ready we are to see 'the human as precisely what is different'" (PETERS, 1999: 230).

7. Peirce's Contributions

PETERS (1999) further explores Peirce's ideas in the final chapters of his book: *"Machines, Animals, and Aliens: Horizons of Incommunicability"* and *"Conclusion: A Squeeze of the Hand."* In these sections, Peirce is presented as a communication theorist, yet within a context that questions the very possibility of true communication. Peters examines the challenges of understanding both the natural world and ourselves, considering the complexities of interaction and interpretation. In dialogue with the ideas of Hegel and Theodor Adorno, he states: "Deliberations about communication are exercises not only in self-knowledge, but in living with the others" (PETERS, 1999: 230).

The author also reflects on the possibility of contact with other intelligent beings. However, the underlying question remains: to what extent is our concept of life merely a reflection of ourselves? Animals and aliens, much like human beings, frequently appear in media, reflecting an enduring desire for broad, all-encompassing communication—a pursuit that has existed since ancient times. Yet, as Peters notes, there is an undeniable tendency to project the human image onto all things.

> "Though the therapists (who want communication to build better relationships) and the technocrats (who want to build better systems) have done their best to suppress the truth that communication has surpassed the human shape, every new technique raises more questions of heteropathic identification" (PETERS, 1999: 229).

Between humanity, nature, and aliens, there exists a fundamental semiotic challenge: the interpretation of meaning remains a persistent issue. PETERS (1999) references PEIRCE's essay *"Some Consequences of Four Incapacities"* (1868) to highlight communication as an open process, one in which "the animal or the inhuman as potential partner and relinquishes any claim of special privilege for the human mind" (PETERS, 1999: 257). The principle of continuity is central to Peircean theory and serves as the key to understanding his broader philosophical framework.

NATHAN HOUSER, in the introduction to the anthology *The Essential Peirce*, defines *synechism* as "the theory that continuity prevails and that the presumption of continuity is of enormous methodological importance for philosophy" (HOUSER, 1992, p. XXII). COLAPIETRO (1989: 68) further explains that Peirce formulated a theory of personality within the context of an evolutionary cosmology, grounded in three key principles: *tychism*, *synechism*, and *agapism*.

HOUSER also emphasizes that Peirce's evolutionary philosophy developed over decades of intellectual production, continuously open to new insights. He states, "Peirce's intellectual life was the evolution of his thought from its quasi-nominalist and idealist beginnings to its broadly and strongly realist conclusion" (HOUSER, 1992, p. XXIV). In the second volume of *The Essential Peirce*, HOUSER notes that, for Peirce, reasoning originates from percepts, which involve three fundamental elements: "qualities of feelings, reactions, and generalizing elements" (HOUSER, 1998, p. XXIII). Neither an idealist nor a positivist, Peirce developed his thought across an astonishingly broad range of disciplines—including philosophy, logic, mathematics, physics, chemistry, and biology—making his work challenging for the average reader to fully grasp. However, his greatest intellectual achievement lay in his ability

to synthesize and systematize knowledge, particularly in phenomenology, logic, and semiotics. These areas of inquiry were shaped by his reflections on an expansive variety of subjects, culminating in a philosophical framework of remarkable depth and coherence.

NATHAN HOUSER and CHRISTIAN KLOESEL introduce Peirce's *"Some Consequences of Four Incapacities"* (1868) as one of his most profound philosophical works. As the editors observe, PEIRCE asserts that "every thought is a sign, so man himself is a sign," thereby positioning himself firmly within the tradition of scholastic realism (PEIRCE, 1992 [1868]:28).

The *four incapacities* identified by PEIRCE serve as a critique of Cartesian thought, particularly its portrayal of the human being as an isolated, purely rational thinker detached from bodily experience. This critique can also be extended to a disembodied understanding of the mind, standing in opposition to both Saint Augustine's perspective and the mythical figures of angels discussed by PETERS (1999). The *four incapacities* identified by PEIRCE are:

1. We have no power of introspection, but all knowledge of the internal world is derived by hypothetical reasoning from our knowledge of external facts.

2. We have no power of intuition, but every cognition is determined logically by previous cognitions.

3. We have no power of thinking without signs.

4. We have no conception of the absolutely incognizable (PEIRCE, 1992 [1868]:30).

In this article, PEIRCE presents the sign as a sensation determined by previous cognitions but suggests the idea of *qualisign* from his other texts, in which sensation is a mere, inexplicable feeling. He points out that "a sensation is not necessarily an intuition," which may be related to the phenomenological

category of *Firstness*. "When the sensation *beautiful* is determined by previous cognitions, it always arises as a predicate." Cognitions run in a "continuous stream through our lives" (PEIRCE, 1992 [1868], p. 42), as is characteristic of signs and the phenomenological category of *Thirdness*.

Sensation and the power of abstraction work together, as they are the constituents of all thought. In this article, PEIRCE defines habits as nervous associations and effects on the nervous system. The "formation of a habit is an induction and is therefore necessarily connected with attention or abstraction. Voluntary actions result from the sensations produced by habits, while instinctive actions result from our original nature" (PEIRCE, 1992 [1868], p. 47). PEIRCE tries to articulate the mental disposition of thought by signs with a realistic concept mediated by materiality, the world, and our bodily condition.

In the article *"The Law of the Mind"* (PEIRCE, 1992 [1892]), he questions the individual conception of ideas, how they pass from mind to mind, recalling the notion of continuity. It is clear "that an idea, once passed, is gone forever" (PEIRCE, 1992 [1892], p. 313). The "present is connected with the past by a series of real infinitesimal steps" (PEIRCE, 1992 [1892], p. 314). The general idea is the result of a series of innumerable feelings of life associated with the present, related to the past and the future. In the text *"Man's Glassy Essence"*, PEIRCE wrote that "consciousness of a habit involves a general idea" (PEIRCE, 1992 [1892], p. 349). The tendency to adopt habits may or may not be mechanical, as it is part of nature to adopt habits with the spread of feelings. Every general idea "has the unified living feeling of a person." The "existence of a person is that the feelings out of which he is constructed should be in close enough connection to influence one another" (PEIRCE, 1992 [1892], p. 350).

HOUSER (1998) explains that the term "pragmatism" was introduced by William James in 1898 in the lecture *"Philosophical Conceptions and Practical Results"*, using the same word previously chosen by Peirce. In the article *"Pragmatism"*, PEIRCE (1998 [1907]) defines this philosophy as being associated with semiotic ideas. For him, every concept of thought is a sign. The interpretant, the new sign produced by the action of the sign,

is constituted by habits. These habits, as he attributes to William James' conception of pragmatism, can be expressed "in the shape of conduct to be recommended or of experience to be expected" (PEIRCE, 1998 [1907], p. 401). Pragmatism is oriented toward reflecting on how the action of signs occurs, produces, changes, and transforms habits. Every "man exercises more or less control over himself by means of modifying his own habits; and the way in which he goes to bring this effect about in those cases in which circumstances will not permit him to practice reiterations of the desired kind of conduct." In this way, semiotics has a vast field and is the "doctrine of the essential nature and fundamental varieties of possible semiosis [or sign actions]" (PEIRCE, 1998 [1907], p. 413).

In interaction with the outside world, habits as signs are not exclusively mental facts. As GÉRARD DELEDALLE (1990) interprets, the mind organizes things or nature through actions, and signs of the phenomenological categories of *Firstness* and *Secondness* become concepts, signs of *Thirdness*, or logical—even if only habits of action. The task of pragmatism could be a critique of the action of signs in the relations between man and other beings, considering the other possible logics they experience. In the article *"Pragmatism"*, PEIRCE (1998 [1907]) chooses the refined meanings of "intellectual concepts," questioning the idea of a direct perception of the world without semiosis. There, he exposes the error of a human understanding of reality as a direct perception, without signs or mediation of individual perception (PEIRCE, 1998 [1907], p. 422). However, GÉRARD DELEDALLE (1990) explains that Peirce's philosophy of continuity—the *synechism*—even when oriented toward the logical meanings of *Thirdness*, is concerned with not placing the human being apart from nature.

According to PETERS (1999), in Peirce's theory of signs, human beings and words, as signs, radiate meanings and develop general ideas. "Words have their associations and communities, just as people or animals do." He states that Peirce's argument is "an effort to invite us into a beloved community, one that includes all forms of intelligence as our partners in some way" (PETERS, 1999, p. 258).

"The pragmatists teach us that we should care for children, animals, the mad, the deformed, spirits and the dead, aliens, and nature—not because they potentially possess an inner life of reason that demands our recognition [...] but because they share our world and our shape. We should relate to animals not because they have minds, but because they have vertebrae, need oxygen, or feel pain. Our obligation to other creatures does not stem from our ability to tap into their inner life but from a primordial kinship deriving from a common biological history, as variant forms of intelligent life that God or nature has seen fit to produce. The kinship we share with all creation is written into our bodies before we ever make mental contact" (PETERS, 1999: 259).

In *The Marvelous Clouds*, PETERS (2015) discusses the meaning of "media" today, once again embracing the tradition of pragmatist thinking. He writes that "Peirce saw signs as embedded in the sporting history of life, and James saw mind as one among many useful evolutionary adaptations" (PETERS, 2015: 44). He defines media, with an ecological perspective, as systems that encompass not only human creations but also their constant interaction with nature. "Media are ensembles of natural elements and human craft. The philosophy of media, once you understand media in this enlarged sense, takes on ample heft and urgency" (PETERS, 2015: 3).

The author highlights intentionality as a significant issue in communication, arguing that it is not as essential as it is generally assumed to be. He considers this within the relationships between various ecological systems. PETERS notes that, despite the artificiality of our world, our bodies maintain relationships with plants and organisms of all kinds. He attributes to pragmatists the understanding of evolution as a process of experimentation and adaptation. "Both mind and nature reach toward the future, intelligently sorting options and seeing what works" (PETERS, 2015: 381). He further states that, for Peirce, "feeling is the key factor linking matter and mind" (PETERS, 2015: 382).

BRUNO LATOUR (2019) does not explicitly mention Peirce. However, one could observe the communication occurring between all beings or minds

through the lens of Peirce's texts. The notion of "self-control," inherent in rhetorical agencies, could be misunderstood as an exclusively rational human behavior. However, semiotically, it can be reinterpreted, considering that each being operates with some form of purpose. This understanding is not limited to symbolic semiosis but also extends to iconic and indexical semiosis.

Without a doubt, Peirce's semiotics provides a logical framework capable of establishing new paradigms for understanding thought and communication—not as an exclusively human activity, but as an ongoing relational process that occurs within the continuum of all beings.

8. Conclusions

In summary, there remains much to explore in the field of rhetoric with the contributions of pragmatism, particularly through the legacy of Peirce. Rhetoric has been closely linked to ethics since antiquity, and as COLAPIETRO (2007) observed, Peirce emphasized the relationship between self-criticism and rhetoric within scientific and philosophical contexts. PETERS (1999) examined the historical development of the concept of communication and highlighted Peirce's contributions, which can be observed both in the evolution of communication itself and in contemporary media.

The question of how we relate to the other remains the central issue in communication, particularly as mediated by technological artifacts. Alterity permeates our lives through signs and semiosis, prompting us to reflect on our existence in relation to everything around us: other human beings, nature altered by human action, and nature in its unaltered state.

Identification and relationships with others, as fundamental rhetorical concerns, present significant challenges among human beings. The contributions of rhetorical and semiotic inquiry are essential for understanding human interactions and their broader implications. Every day, we take new steps forward amidst ideological, cultural, and political conflicts. PETERS

(1999/2015) offers valuable insights into the philosophical legacy of Peirce and the pragmatists, expanding our understanding of communication not only between human beings but also in relation to other forms of existence.

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