

The Two-Way Interpretation Process in Peirce's Late Semiotics: *A Priori* and *a Posteriori*

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Abstract

On his own admission Peirce's priority in his work in semiotics concerned the identification of all possible signs, and it is clearly for this reason that of the two typologies announced in the letter to Lady Welby of 23 December 1908—one yielding twenty-eight classes and the other sixty-six—it was the latter that he found the more interesting, to the complete neglect of the former. And yet contributing to the originality of this particular typology is the fact that after 1906 Peirce appears no longer to employ his phaneroscopic categories as the criteria for establishing the various subdivisions in his classifications, preferring instead three modally organized universes, and, in the period from 1907 on, a growing appeal to the requirement of collateral observation of the object in definitions of the sign—both these factors being associated with a greater understanding of the nature of the dynamic object, particularly in the period 1908-1909. The paper thus seeks to demonstrate the potential for semiotic analysis of Peirce's neglected 28-class classification system by showing its originality within the fifteen or more typologies he developed between 1866 and 1908. This, it is to be hoped, will compensate for Peirce's neglect by showing how an examination of the evolving typologies sheds light on the development of his conception of signs and on the shift in the theoretical framework which underwrote it.

Keywords: typology, sign-system, semiosis, interpretant, interpretative strategy

1. Introduction

In our post-Barthes age of semiotic analysis it is easy to forget that Peirce was interested in signs primarily as a logician and conceived logic as “semeiotic”,¹ a discipline which is only distantly related to present-day semiotic and semiological theory. In view of this, it is important to understand that the approach adopted here departs from standard Peircean

practice—in particular his own but also that of many Peirce theorists—and this concern has determined the structure of the paper. The first section deals with Peirce’s stated aims, methodology and achievements in the classification of signs by examining a number of his typologies. After having established the status of classifications in his semiotics, the paper then sets out some of the major stages in their development and describes the significant differences between the well-canvassed 1903 definition of the sign with its ten-class typology and the later classification systems. Since the purpose of the paper is to examine and illustrate the potential for semiotic analysis of the simpler of the two late typologies the second section introduces the salient features of Peirce’s conception of signs and semiosis with its six correlates as it developed in the four years following the 1903 Lowell Lectures on logic. The final section exploits a particular aspect of the 28-class system, namely the possibility of analyzing interpretation in two different “directions”—an introduction to what in the title is referred to as *a priori* and *a posteriori* interpretation—illustrating these distinct interpretative strategies with two simple examples.

2. Peirce’s Evolving Typologies

2.1 The semiotician as zoologist

In order to understand the specificity of Peirce’s conception of semiotics as a form of logic it helps to consider the following remarks from a letter to Lady Welby:

What is the essential difference between a sign that is communicated to a mind, and one that is not so communicated? If the question were simply what we do mean by a sign, it might soon be resolved. But that is not the point. We are in the situation of a zoölogist who wants to know what ought to be the meaning of “fish” in order to make fishes one of the great classes of vertebrates. (CP 8.332, 1904)

and this, from one of the variants of the “Pragmatism” text of 1907:

Now how would you define a *sign*, Reader? I do not ask how the word is ordinarily used. I want such a definition as a zoologist would give of a fish, or a chemist of a fatty body, or of an aromatic body,—an analysis of the essential nature of a sign, if the word is to be used as applicable to everything which the most general science of sēmei’otic must regard as its business to study (R318 585, 1907)

Both leave the reader in no doubt as to the importance of classification in his very personal approach to semiotics as a form of logic. Now in his 1902 Carnegie application Peirce had already defined methodeutic, conceived as the defining methodology of logic, to be composed of the analytical processes of definition and the establishment of divisions (RL75 242-244, 1902). In this way, the correlates involved in semiosis either singly or combined were defined as divisions and then subdivided, thereby making it possible to

establish ever more complex classification systems. Clearly, Peirce saw work in semiotics much like that of the zoologist, and his own methodology involved this complex process of definition and division yielding the fifteen or more typologies we now dispose of, twelve of which were established in the four years following the Lowell Lectures (Table 1).

Moreover, for Peirce, like that of the zoologist, the goal of the semiotician was not simply to classify signs, it was to identify and “collect” as many as possible in order to guarantee the validity of his observations:

Possibly a zoölogist or a botanist may have so definite a conception of what a species is that a single type-specimen may enable him to say whether a form of which he finds a specimen belongs to the same species or not. But it will be much safer to have a large number of individual specimens before him, from which he may get an idea of the amount and kind of individual or geographical variation to which the given species is subject. (CP 1.224, 1902)

In view of the fact that his first typology in the period 1866-1867 was composed of a single division of representamens—Peirce’s term for the unit of representation at that time—namely, likeness (icon), index or sign (as he conceived it then) and symbol, with the symbol subdivided into argument, proposition and term, and that his best-known typology from the 1903 Lowell Lectures on Logic comprised the sign and the sign-object and sign-interpretant divisions, the twelve classification systems which he derived from the six-correlate conception of sign-action beginning in 1904 are testimony to the intensive work he undertook in the establishment of typologies in the four years that followed.

Table 1. Fifteen typologies established between 1867 and 1908²

Date:	Order of correlates
1867	'S-O'
R478 1903	S-O, S-I
R540 1903	S, S-O, S-I
Aug 1904?	(S); S-Od, Oi; lsig (=lf), ld, l(i)
07/08/1904	(S), Oi, S-Od, li, ld, lsignified
12/10/1904	S, S-Od, S-Oi; S-lf, S-ld, S-li
08/10/1905	S, Oi, Od, li, ld, lsig (=lf)
09/10/1905	S, Oi, Od, lf (incomplete)
13/10/1905	S, Oi, Od α , Od β , li, ld α , ld β , lf α , lf β , lfy
06/03/1906	Od, Oi, S, li, ld, lf (reconstructed with interpretants standardized)
31/03/1906	S, Oi, Od, S-Od, li, ld, S-ld, lf, Pass(lf), Signif(lf)
31/08/1906	S, Oi, Od, S-Od, li, ld, '(S-ld)', purpose(lf), influence(S), Ass. of S to Interp.
23/12/1908	Od, Oi, S, li, ld, lf; S-Od, S-ld, S-O-I, S-lf (interpretants standardized)
24/12/1908	S, Oi, Od, S-Od, li, ld, S-ld, lf, S-lf, S-Od-lf (interpretants standardized)
25/12/1908	S, Oi, Od, S-Od, li, ld, S-ld, lf, S-lf, S-O-lf (interpretants standardized)

Table 1, in which the three interpretants in the later typologies have been standardized

to “immediate”, “dynamic” and “final” as Peirce described them in the letter to Lady Welby of 14 March 1909 (SS 109-111), bears out the following independent judgment: “We may add now that logic also is a classificatory science...and that in his own lifetime as a whole, [Peirce] devoted more labor to the classification of signs than to any other single field of research.”³ It was thus as a complex process of definition and division and the subsequent classification of the results that Peirce saw his task as a logician. Should there be any doubt as to this the following statement from a letter to William James makes the situation very clear: “My classification of signs, however, is intended to be a classification of *possible* signs and therefore observation of existing signs is only of use in suggesting and reminding one of varieties that one might otherwise overlook” (EP2 500, 1909). By examining a number of actual signs in the final section of the paper the approach adopted here, then, differs from Peirce’s own practice.

2.2 The changing theoretical framework

The general order of divisions to be seen on Table 1 is what we might call “correlate” order, the order of general triadic relations as Peirce defined them in 1903, namely the first, second and third correlates “realized” respectively as Representamen, Object and Interpretant (EP2 290), the sign itself being a species of representamen (EP2 291). On Table 1 the majority of post-1904 typologies have this complex correlate order: **S, Oi, Od, Ii, Id, If**, with various other relational divisions interleaved between these correlates or placed after them. If we consider the following three tables in detail we see clearly how Peirce’s conception of signs and semiosis matured after 1904.

Table 2. The typology of 1903

	Category		
	Firstness	Secondness	Thirdness
Respect			
Sign	Qualisign	Sinsign	Legisign
Sign-Object	Icon	Index	Symbol
Sign-Interpretant	Rheme	Dicisign	Argument

Source: EP2 290-293

Examining first Table 2, we note that the correlates **S, O, I**, defined in 1903 as the constituents of a triadic relation, constitute the “respects”⁴—as Peirce called the facets of semiosis contributing to the classification of the sign—by means of which he obtained ten classes of signs. The three divisions themselves are realized as the sign **S** plus two relational trichotomies, namely **S—O** and **S—I**, respectively the sign’s mode of representation and the sign’s relation to its interpretant. We note that the mode of representation doesn’t actually identify the sign’s object, it simply constitutes the three distinct ways in which that object can be represented by the sign. Finally, the criteria

enabling him to subdivide the three trichotomies are Peirce's three phenomenological categories, namely, Firstness, Secondness and Thirdness.

Table 3. The hexad of 12 October 1904

	Category		
	Firstness	Secondness	Thirdness
Respect			
S	qualisign	sinsign	legisign
S-Od	icon	index	symbol
S-Oi	S of quality	S of experience	S of law
S-If	rheme	dicent	argument
S-Id	contemplated S	urged S	submitted S
S-li	S interpreted by feeling	S interpreted by experience	S interpreted by thought

Source: SS 32-36

In Table 3, which sets out in tabular form Peirce's description of this typology in the letter to Lady Welby of 12 October 1904, the correlates associated with the sign have been expanded from two to five: semiosis now involves not three but six elements, namely the sign, the immediate object, the dynamic object and the interpretants, standardized above as immediate (**Ii**), dynamic (**Id**) and final (**If**). The typology itself has as its respects the sign plus a set of five divisions, all relational as in 1903. We note, too, that the criteria enabling the analyst to establish the classification are the same three phenomenological categories as in 1903.

Table 4, displaying the set of six divisions occupying the initial positions in the ten described by Peirce in his letter to Lady Welby of 23 December 1908, is formatted vertically as Peirce might have done if he had isolated and described this particular 28-class typology. This classification system employs the same six correlates as on Table 3, but by 1908 Peirce's conception of the classification of signs can be seen in Table 4 to have matured considerably. First, it is the correlates themselves which constitute the respects, as opposed to the sign and its two and five relational divisions employed respectively in Tables 2 and 3. Second, the criteria employed to establish the subdivisions are no longer the three categories, for these have been replaced by three logical universes distinguished by one or other of three modalities of being: a universe of necessitants, one of existents and one of possibles, in order of decreasing complexity. Logical universes are defined by Peirce to be receptacles (CP 4.545, 1906), of which the "subjects" or members are none other than the six correlates: the sign, for example, is now classified with respect to one or other of three subdivisions corresponding to the modality of being of the universe with which a given subject—the dynamic object, say—is associated. For example, if the dynamic object is a possible then the sign is an abstractive, or if the immediate interpretant is an existent the sign is categorical, while if the sign itself is a necessitant it is a type (a term now replacing the legisign of the 1903-1904 period).

Table 4. The hexad of 23 December 1908 formatted “vertically” as Peirce might have done⁵

	Universe		
	Possible	Existent	Necessitant
Subject			
Od	abstractive	concretive	collective
Oi	descriptive	designative	copulant
S	mark	token	type
li	hypothetical	categorical	relative
ld	sympathetic	percussive	usual
lf	gratific	to produce action	to produce self-control

Source: SS 83-85

3. The Sign-System of 1908

To understand just how great the changes in Peirce’s theoretical framework had become by 1908 requires a necessarily succinct description of the 1908 system. Semiosis or sign-action itself he first defined explicitly in 1907 as the cooperation of the three correlates: sign, object and interpretant (CP 5.484). However, in the letter to Lady Welby of 1908 he “refracted” this triadic cooperation to a system of six correlates in a statement which also appears to be the only time Peirce mentions the 28-class typology:

It is evident that a possible can determine nothing but a Possible, it is equally so that a Necessitant can be determined by nothing but a Necessitant. Hence it follows from the Definition of a Sign that since the Dynamoid Object determines the Immediate Object, which determines the Sign itself, which determines the Destinate Interpretant, which determines the Effective Interpretant, which determines the Explicit Interpretant, the six trichotomies, instead of determining 729 classes of signs, as they would if they were independent, only yield twenty-eight classes; and if, as I strongly opine (not to say almost prove) there are four other trichotomies of signs of the same order of importance, instead of making 59049 classes, these will only come to sixty-six. (SS 84)

This concise statement establishes both an order of determination and a hierarchical principle which limits the six divisions to twenty-eight classes and the ten divisions to sixty-six. Figure 1, in which the arrow signifies the dynamic process of determination—that is, the process by which one correlate causes the following one to be such as it is—sets out the correlates as described above in the order of determination. Most notable in the statement is that unlike the typology order on Tables 2 and 3 and the predominant order in the typologies in Table 1, this process begins with the dynamic object followed successively by the immediate object and the sign itself, this being followed by the

interpretants standardized as immediate, dynamic and final. The following paragraphs summarize some of the more important points contributing to the emergence of the two late typologies generated by this important definition.

Figure 1. Hexadic semiosis in 1908

$$\text{Od} \rightarrow \text{Oi} \rightarrow \text{S} \rightarrow \text{Ii} \rightarrow \text{Id} \rightarrow \text{If}$$

3.1 The sign

In addition to the redefinition of the sign as the medium for the communication of a form originating in the dynamic object, and to the distinction between immediate and dynamic object, Peirce also introduces important distinctions concerning the interpretants (SS 97), but discussion of these in particular is held over to a later section of the paper for reasons of pertinence. Consider, in the meantime, the following statement from the *Minute Logic*:

Transuational logic, which I term *Speculative Rhetoric*, is substantially what goes by the name of methodology, or better, of *methodeutic*. It is the doctrine of the general conditions of the reference of Symbols and other Signs to the Interpretants which they aim to determine. (CP 2.93, 1902).

At this point (1902), Peirce seemed to consider signs as the principal determining agency, since they are defined almost anthropomorphically as “aiming” to determine their interpretants, but by 1906 he had considerably modified the role of the sign in semiosis, explicitly attributing to it a strictly constrained mediating role, as we see in the following extract from RL463, a 55-page draft to Lady Welby dated 9 March 1906:

I use the word “*Sign*” in the widest sense for any medium for the communication or extension of a Form (or feature). Being medium, it is determined by something, called its Object, and determines something, called its Interpretant [. . .] In order that a Form may be extended or communicated, it is necessary that it should have been really embodied in a Subject independently of the communication; and it is necessary that there should be another subject in which the same form is embodied only as a consequence of the communication. (SS 196)

Figure 2, a photograph of a French pavement artist completing a portrait, is a good, if simple, illustration of the process described by Peirce above, and exemplifies how the form of the dynamic object can be represented in the shape of the immediate object on a medium such as a sheet of paper. If we consider the scene in Figure 2 we can easily recognize how it would fit into the theoretical framework of 1906. The young woman being represented is the artist's sitter or model, and constitutes the dynamic object of the sketch. The representation which an observer sees is a determination of the immediate object—that is, the model *as represented*. The sheet from the sketch-pad itself with the various pencil or charcoal marks on its surface constitutes the medium, the material entity which receives the compound form communicated by the immediate object, and simultaneously conveys

this form to whatever potential interpretant sequence the image may produce.

Figure 2. Street artist on the Place du Tertre, Montmartre, February 2007, Wikimedia commons © Olivier Bruchez



The artist, an instance of Peirce’s utterer, is outside the process. He executes the sketch but in doing so he is simply the vector of the artistic trends and ideologies of his culture: according to Peirce’s conception of the sign as medium in 1906 it is the dynamic object which structures the representation on the sign, not the artist, for Peirce was concerned with logic, not, it should be remembered, with art history or psychology. From the 1906 draft on, then, in theory only the object can determine the sign, while the 1906 redefinition of the sign simply as a medium had the effect of diminishing the importance of both the sign itself and the utterer and interpreter in semiosis: there can be no form in the sign that hasn’t emanated from the object. These are indispensable agencies in any semiosis, for there would not be a sign in the first place without them, but it is the object rather than the utterer that is the determinant of the structure of the sign. And this is just as true of caricature and Cubism as it is of straightforward portraits such as the one in Figure 2.

Note at this point that Peirce’s idiosyncratic use of the terms “utter” and “utterer” can be clarified by means of the following important definition from a manuscript: “To signify that a person puts forth a sign whether vocal, ocular, or by touch,—and conventional signs mostly are of one or other of these three kinds or by taste, smell, and a sense of temperature which are the media of many natural *tests* and *symptoms*,—I like the word “*utter*” (R793 14, 1906): to utter, then, is Peirce’s general term for the production of a sign, and such an “utterance” is not necessarily verbal as it would be for a linguist.

Summarizing, then, it follows that by defining the sign as a medium Peirce attributed a greater role to the object in semiosis: it communicates form via the immediate object to the sign, which then communicates it to the series of interpretants, the form in question being the realization of one or other or all of Peirce’s categories of the forms of experience, namely the monad, dyad and triad (CP 1.452, 1896), and this independently

of the utterer and the interpreter as participants in the semiosis. Such a position, of course, raises the questions of what sort of entity the dynamic object is and what its semiotic scope may be, and, until the 1908-1909 period, it was a position which attributed to the utterer as sign-producer what might be misunderstood by many observers as a semiotically indeterminate status.

3.2 The two objects

It was in the following terms that Peirce introduced the two objects in a letter to William James dated 14 March 1909:

We must distinguish between the Immediate Object,—i.e., the Object as represented in the Sign,—and the Real (no, because perhaps the Object is altogether fictive, I must choose a different term; therefore:), say rather the Dynamical Object, which, from the nature of things, the Sign *cannot* express, which it can only *indicate* and leave the interpreter to find out by *collateral experience*. (CP 8.314)

The fact that the two objects are two distinct “subjects” or “respects” in a typology, as in the hexad in Table 4, makes it possible for them to have different ontological values within it, a principle that Peirce had already advanced in the Logic Notebook: “The immediate object of a sign may be of quite a different nature from the real dynamical object” (R339 277r, 1906). Moreover, just as the 1906 definition of the sign as medium had the effect of redefining the role of the sign in semiosis, at the same time it gave the immediate object a specific representative status as a sort of filter communicating parts of the form or structure of the dynamic object to the sign as can be seen on Figure 2 in the form of the necessarily vague, two-dimensional representation of the very definite three-dimensional female sitter.

However, in addition to these notable advances in Peirce's understanding of the object, yet another stage occurs after 1906, and concerns two important ways in which he expanded its scope within his logic. Indeed, his final statements describing the universes of experience composed of necessitant, existent and possible entities and his examples of the types of subjects these universes can be the receptacles of enable us to establish just how it is that the interpreter is logically able to identify an object, for example, which is not necessarily like its representation. We need, then, to consider Peirce's conception of the three universes mentioned in the December 1908 letter to Lady Welby and their modalities of being, and the important idea that the object itself can determine a universe of existence.

In a draft to Lady Welby dated 25 December 1908 (CP 8.366), he illustrated the range of dynamic objects of signs according to the universe to which they belong: possibles (signs of such objects being abstractives), existent objects (individuals and the facts concerning them, signs of these being concretives) and general collections or classes (signs of these being collectives), thereby giving us a broad idea of the sorts of entities these universes might be the receptacles of. In the first case the objects are qualitative entities represented by colors,

mass, texture, etc.; in the second, existents such as humans, animals, tables, individuals and named individuals such as Napoleon and Charlemagne; finally, in the third, general classes such as mankind, prime numbers, classes, categories, habits and types. However, in another text of 1908, “The Neglected Argument for the Reality of God”, he breaks new ground, describing the three universes and, more importantly, the sorts of objects they comprise in greater detail. The least complex, the universe of possible objects “holds” ideas; the second universe is composed of existent objects—occurrences and the facts involving them; the third and most complex universe comprises more general objects:

The third Universe comprises everything whose Being consists in active power to establish connections between different objects, especially between objects in different Universes. Such is everything which is essentially a Sign,—not the mere body of the sign, which is not essentially such, but, so to speak, the Sign’s Soul, which has its Being in its power of serving as intermediary between its Object and a Mind. Such, too, is a living consciousness, and such the life, the power of growth, of a plant. Such is a living institution,—a daily newspaper, a great fortune, a social “movement.” (CP 6.455)

It follows from the sections above that what we see when we look at an image such as those in Figures 2 and 3 to follow is, of course, what their immediate objects have filtered through to them from the object they represent. We also know now that by 1908 Peirce had defined the range of possible dynamic objects to be virtually inexhaustible, and that the immediate object is not in any way necessarily like the dynamic. Peirce’s late illustration of various types of dynamic objects—“a daily newspaper, a great fortune, a social ‘movement’”—not only opens up our understanding of how others interpret signs but also liberates our own conception of what a sign might stand for. Barely three months after the 23 December letter to Lady Welby Peirce offered in a draft to William James a frustratingly brief description of the relation holding between the universes and the objects which determine them. The 26 February 1909 letter to James offers the following examples:

In the sentence instanced [‘Napoleon is lethargic’] Napoleon is not the only Object... For the object of “Napoleon” is the Universe of Existence so far as it is determined by the fact of Napoleon being a Member of it. The Object of the sentence “Hamlet was insane” is the Universe of Shakespeare’s Creation so far as it is determined by Hamlet being a part of it. The Object of the Command “Ground arms!” is the immediately subsequent action of the soldiers so far as it is affected by the molition expressed in the command. It cannot be understood unless collateral observation shows the speaker’s relation to the rank of soldiers. You may say, if you like, that the Object is in the Universe of things desired by the Commanding Captain at that moment. Or since the obedience is fully expected, it is in the Universe of his expectation. (EP2 493, 1909)

Like the extract from “The Neglected Argument for the Reality of God”, this introduces a series of examples of how a universe is determined by the objects that are members of it.

At the same time, it neutralizes neatly the conventional distinction between fact and fiction, between cases where the universe is “real” and where it is “fictive”. The universe determined by Napoleon’s being a member of it and the universe determined by Hamlet’s being a member of it are, from a purely *logical* point of view, the same sorts of universe; this means, too, that Napoleon, Hamlet and Othello, for example, determine their respective universes, and, again from a logical point of view, there is absolutely no difference between them, either. Note, too, that without indulging in any form of psychologism, Peirce has redefined the participation of the utterer in semiosis: whatever motivation he or she has in uttering a sign, the object of the motivation is to be sought in a universe determined by that very object—desire, expectation, volition: this is an important statement which in no way invalidates the earlier principle that there is nothing in the sign that doesn’t originate in the object or in the universe defined by that object; moreover, it removes the apparent indeterminacy of the status of the utterer in semiosis mentioned above.

4. The Two-Way Interpretation Process

4.1 The three interpretants

The principal sources for what we know of the three interpretants really belong to the very rich period of 1905-06, particularly with the draft letter to Lady Welby mentioned above, in which we find the following description:

There is the *Intentional* Interpretant, which is a determination of the mind of the utterer; the *Effectual* Interpretant, which is a determination of the mind of the interpreter; and the *Communicational* Interpretant, or say the *Cominterpretant*, which is a determination of that mind into which the minds of utterer and interpreter have to be fused in order that any communication should take place. This mind may be called the *commens*. It consists of all that is, and must be, well understood between utterer and interpreter, at the outset, in order that the sign in question should fulfill its function. (SS 196-197, 1906)

There is also, from this period, the “Prolegomena to an Apology for Pragmaticism” (CP 4.538-572, 1906), followed by the 23 December 1908 letter to Lady Welby quoted earlier, and above all the letter to Lady Welby of 14 March 1909 (SS 108-119) and various drafts to William James in 1909 (e.g. EP2 493-500). Whereas the immediate and dynamic interpretants generally retain their denominations after 1906 we note in this period a certain terminological instability characteristic of Peirce’s theoretical struggle with the complex systems he was working on, as a result of which the final interpretant received a number of different appellations. However, by 1909, the interpretant system had been standardized to immediate, dynamic and final:

My Immediate Interpretant is implied in the fact that each Sign must have its peculiar Interpretability before it gets any Interpreter. My Dynamical Interpretant is that which is

experienced in each act of Interpretation and is different in each from that of the other; and the Final Interpretant is the one Interpretative result to which every Interpreter is destined to come if the Sign is sufficiently considered. The Immediate Interpretant is an abstraction, consisting in a Possibility. The Dynamical Interpretant is a single actual event. The Final Interpretant is that toward which the actual tends. (SS 111, 1909)

Now the relations between the interpretants and the subdivisions that the modal distinctions within the three universes determine can be seen more clearly on Table 5 than on the vertical disposition of the same elements on Table 4. It also makes more visible the hierarchy principle that a possible can determine nothing but a possible and that a necessitant can be determined by nothing but a necessitant. This means that if the order of the subjects in Tables 4 and 5 is correct, a concretion sign at the existent **Od** stage cannot logically be classified as copulant at the necessitant **Oi** stage; in other words, an existent dynamic object cannot determine a necessitant immediate object in semiosis. We also see clearly within this format that a given token, for example, may be classified as having both a dynamic and an immediate object more complex than itself by virtue of their being placed higher up in the hierarchy; that the immediate object can be as complex as, or less complex than the dynamic object; and that the token can determine a sequence of interpretants which may be of the same or lesser complexity than itself. This important principle, which is less visible on Table 4, makes it possible to establish how a seemingly innocuous sign can nevertheless be the determination of some complex ideological (necessitant, therefore) dynamic object.

Table 5. The hexad of 23 December 1908 with the subjects set out ‘orthogonally’

	Subject					
	Od	Oi	S	li	ld	lf
Universe						
Necessitant	collective	copulant	type	relative	usual	to produce self-control
Existent	concretive	designative	token	categorical	percussive	to produce action
Possible	abstractive	descriptive	mark	hypothetical	sympathetic	gratific

Since Table 5 is spread orthogonally across the page it is thus easier to read and exploit than Table 4: the sequence of “subjects” can be read in two directions, corresponding to two types of interpretation, which, for want of better terms, are here referred to as *a priori* and *a posteriori* interpretation strategies. At this point, the reader is reminded that Peirce never developed the 28-class system; that he was not specifically interested in classifying existing signs as in the examples below; and that he never ever set out his typologies in this horizontal format. From here on, then, the paper departs consciously from Peirce’s methodology and semiotic purpose, with the intention of bringing out some notable differences between the late 28-class system and the earlier one of 1903, which, it will be remembered, involved a single interpretant.

4.2 *A posteriori* interpretation

What follows is a brief analysis, based upon the hexad in Table 5, of the more conventional procedure in semiotics, *a posteriori*, in which we take an interpretation and follow it retrospectively, so to speak, through the various stages of its evolution in a verbal example in a necessarily schematic manner. Consider, to begin with, the italicized sentences in the following extract from a detective novel:

Wylie smiled, brought the car in to the kerbside and pulled on the handbrake. Hood opened his door a fraction and peered down. "*No*" he said, "*this is fine. I can walk to the kerb from here.*" Wylie gave his arm a thump. He suspected it would bruise. (Rankin, 2000, p. 196)

All three would be classified within the 1903 ten-class system as dicisigns—replicas of dicent symbols—and yet we know that this abstract “parts-of-speech” classification tells us nothing of their communicative purpose, which we understand clearly as we read the book to be a teasing remark followed by a robust reaction from the addressee. The 1908 system provides us with a more appropriate analytical approach, here an *a posteriori* analysis of the interpretant sequence, which enables us to explain within a *logical* framework why the first of the two sentences was uttered and the effects that it produced. The first of the italicized sentences—here the sign—is ironic: we understand the speaker to be deliberately wishing to draw attention to the poor parking skills of his colleague. The second describes an action from which we as readers infer that at the immediate interpretant stage the ironic intent of the utterance—its dynamic object—has been understood. The dynamic interpretant is emphatically existent, thereby conditioning the final, which is realized here as the thump on the arm. This enables us to classify the initial utterance as an action-producing copulant token, although from a research point of view it is more interesting to examine the semiotic processes which lead to such a conclusion. *A posteriori* analysis thus involves following a sequence of actual reactions as they are determined by a given sign, a process which assimilates the creation of narrative utterances to a sequence of semioses.

4.3 *A priori* interpretation

However, there is nothing to stop us from using the system displayed on Table 5 in an *a priori* fashion, that is, in a projective capacity where we analyze the sign as the stimulus for a specific set of intended interpretants which the “utterer” or sign-producer hopes to set in motion, for within the late semiotics the latter’s motivation constitutes the object which conditions the form characterizing the sign. Consider, first, a selection of epigrams from Oscar Wilde’s *Phrases and Philosophies for the Use of the Young* (1894):

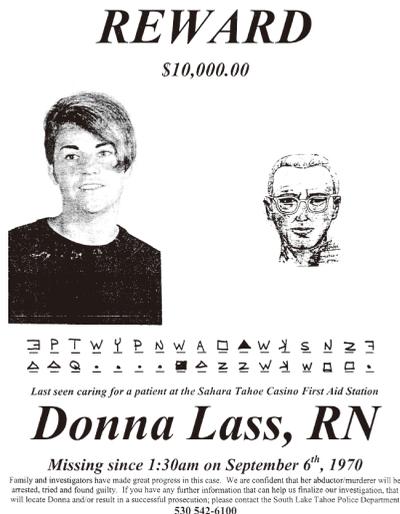
- Industry is the root of all ugliness.
- Wickedness is a myth invented by good people to account for the curious attractiveness of others.

- Dullness is the coming of age of seriousness.
- A really well-made buttonhole is the only link between Art and Nature.
- Ambition is the last refuge of the failure.
- In examinations the foolish ask questions that the wise cannot answer.

There were some thirty-five such aphorisms that Wilde contributed to an Oxford University student magazine’s single issue. As signs they are all replicas of dicent symbols, and as such are no different *logically* from the sentences in the extract from the detective story examined above. However, the system represented on Table 5 enables us to distinguish their very different communicative purposes, for as we read them we understand them to be the expressions of Wilde’s intention to subvert contemporary middle-class Victorian moral values and to reject the horrors of the Industrial Revolution. In other words, we interpret his having expressed himself in this way—this intentionality being the signs’ necessitant dynamic object—as his desire to amuse students and shock everybody else. Attempting to imagine Wilde’s targeted public responses—the aphorisms’ final interpretants—can be assimilated to an *a priori* interpretative strategy which hypothesizes the effects from a cause, and we have no difficulty in imagining the outrage stuffy Victorians would have felt on becoming acquainted with them.

We conclude with Figure 3, a poster offering a reward for any information leading to the discovery of a young woman who has disappeared, and asking for the general public’s help in tracing the whereabouts of this particular missing person.

Figure 3. A missing person poster, Wikimedia Commons



Within the 1903 ten-class system displayed above on Table 2 this multimodal sign integrating image and text would, like the utterances from the extract discussed above, be classified as a dicisign, another complex replica of a dicent symbol. But this is all we could say about it as we can only establish its object by some form of collateral reasoning (which,

as it happens, involves following the stages set out on Tables 4 and 5!). On the other hand, equipped with what we know of Peirce's late conceptions of the two objects and the three interpretants, we can analyze and classify the poster very differently by means of the system set out on Table 5. The dynamic object is not, contrary to what we might think working within the 1903 system, the missing person, but, rather, the universe defined by the parents' wish to receive information leading to the discovery of her whereabouts. This dynamic object filters through to the poster by means of the immediate object in the form of this specific blend of text and image. At the **Od** and **Oi** stages on Table 5, then, the sign is respectively, collective and copulant.⁶ The sign itself, the medium communicating the parents' wish to prospective interpreters, is the existential paper and ink support placed in appropriate public places: it is a token—it has to be, otherwise no one would perceive it. As far as the targeted interpretants are concerned, the immediate would be some member of the public's seeing the poster and understanding its import, while the dynamic would be their psychic or physical reaction, as the sign is intended to be percussive or "shocking" (EP2 490, 1908). Now such an existential dynamic interpretant is the precondition for the final interpretant to be an action, and so hopefully this final reaction would, with the promise of a substantial reward, be a phone call to the parents or to the police.

5. Conclusion

The paper has sought to illustrate a particularity of one of Peirce's two late typologies, namely the opportunity for semiotic analysis afforded by the interpretant system it incorporates. However, there are two aspects to the problem of exploiting the 28-class system that should be borne in mind before coming to any conclusion. First, although the system displayed on Table 5 is restricted to six divisions whereas practicing publicists and lawmakers, for example, might proceed in far more stages in the preparation of their advertisements and injunctions, it must be remembered that we are dealing here with semiotics, which Peirce saw as a form of logic, not psychology, market research or ministerial decision-making. Although probably much simplified when compared with actual decision-making or project-management, the 1908 hexad is nevertheless a logical, semiotic blueprint for such procedures and enables the logician/semiotician to treat them as complex forms of semiosis. Second, it should be remembered, too, that while his terminology concerning the two objects was very stable, Peirce was not entirely satisfied with the names he gave to the various interpretant subdivisions or with the order in which these divisions were to be combined. The remarks and analyses proposed above have, therefore, a necessarily tentative character. This said, the verbal example was subjected to a conventional semiotic analysis but, with three interpretants to work with and by referring to the set as displayed on Table 4 and, in particular, to the orthogonally organized set on Table 5, it was inspected more fully than would have been possible in 1903, and offered a clear if simple example of the procedure involved in *a posteriori* interpretation.

As a simple case of *a priori* interpretation it was shown that the sign in Figure 3 had

been carefully designed to produce a specific action, a procedure which is repeated in a multitude of different circumstances in commerce, government and education, to name but three domains in which institutional or other “engineers of consent”⁷ seek to persuade people to act in a certain way or to impose actions and habits upon them. Table 5 offers a broad outline for the stages through which a publicist, for example, might proceed when planning the image to be given of some product (by manipulation of the immediate object): deciding upon the support or medium on which the complex form emanating from the dynamic object via the immediate is to be communicated, carefully constraining the immediate interpretant (for this, after all, as Peirce states in the extract from the 9 March 1906 draft given above, is a determination of the mind of the sign’s utterer (SS 196)), targeting the dynamic interpretant, and, finally, persuading the observer to act (by buying the product, for example). Table 5 thus provides a general *logical* framework for the analysis of advertisements and official injunctions such as *Halt*, or *Your Country Needs You* or *No Smoking*, realized as a multitude of different signs which invade our lives through such media as hoardings, traffic signals, giant screens outside department stores and even in such varied print media as newspapers, flyers and the glossy pages in magazines. Moreover, these print media are now giving place more and more to the tactile medium of the screen on computers, telephones, tablets and the e-book. After 1906, by enabling analysts to treat these diverse types of consent engineering, however complex, as realizations of semiosis Peirce introduced a very modern definition of the sign as medium and a logic-based model for general interpretative strategies.

At the same time, such interpretative strategies raise a very important issue, which we can see clearly from Table 5, namely the status and nature of the dynamic object, which, within the logic of the 28-class hexad, can be up to two degrees more general than its generally very material representation in the sign: a token can represent a necessitant dynamic object, making it a collective sign at the **Od** division on Table 5. Similarly, returning to the hypothetical case of the publicist, there is no logical necessity for the dynamic object to resemble its inevitably incomplete representation communicated to the sign by the immediate object. This logically justified possibility of disparities between the two objects and the medium communicating their form surely offers semioticians the means of investigating signs in a way that was not possible with the ten-class system of 1903. The two types of analysis above were offered as simple illustrations of such investigative strategies, in which the *a posteriori* approximates to the way we read and interpret narrative sequences in image and text, while the *a priori* strategy models in an admittedly broad fashion the semiosis involved in the minutiae of complex decision-making.

Notes

- 1 Cf., for example: “[Logic] is general semeiotic, treating not merely of truth, but also of the general conditions of signs being signs...” (CP 1.444, 1903)
- 2 It is difficult to date the typology identified as “Aug 1904?”. It occurs on the verso of page 239 dated 10 July 1903 of the Logic Notebook, facing a similar hexadic

typology on 240r dated 7 August 1904. Peirce seems to have added it after the August typology, which is why it has been indicated with a question mark. In any case, with its hexadic structure it is obviously from 1904 and not 1903.

- 3 Max Fisch in his Introduction to the first volume of the *Writings*, 1982, p. xxii.
- 4 Cf. EP2 482, for example.
- 5 Note that, as on Table 4, the labels have been completed from the draft of 25 December 1908 (EP2 488-490).
- 6 In the draft of 25 December 1908 Peirce describes the connective function of copulants in the following manner: 'C. Copulants, which neither describe nor denote their Objects, but merely express the logical relations of these latter to something otherwise referred to. Such, among linguistic signs, as "If -- then --," "-- is --," "-- causes --," "-- would be --," "-- is relative to -- for -- " "Whatever" etc.' (CP 8.350). He was, of course, concerned here with the connectives employed in standard logic, not with the combining of modes as displayed in multimodal signs such as the one in Figure 3.
- 7 Cf. Bernays (1947).

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