

On the integration of the differentiated: a Peircean outlook on Latin American identity

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abstract

The central argument of the paper concerns the logical or semiotic functioning of the self in our globalized world. It aims at explaining how there is no hope for a non utopian inclusion of otherness, unless we substitute dualism – which Peirce (CP 7.570) described as the doctrine which “performs its analyses with an axe, leaving as the ultimate elements unrelated chunks of being” – for the doctrine of logical continuity or synechism. The dualistic thinking, which has ruled modernity ever since Descartes, in the 17th century, set the path for Western science and everyday life alike, is illustrated by revisiting a century old debate on the authentic identity of Latin America. The voices of two thinkers which are considered by the author as “prope-pragmaticists”, namely, Spanish philosopher Unamuno and Argentinean writer Borges, provide relevant evidence of how Peirce’s pragmatistic critique of dualism can and should be applied to a central problem in the humanities: how to account for cultural identity in contemporary society without excluding otherness.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Peircean synechism; critique of dualism; self as sign; Latin American identity

resumo

A questão central deste trabalho é sobre o funcionamento lógico ou semiótico do self em nosso mundo globalizado. Seu objetivo é demonstrar que não há esperança para uma concepção não-utópica da inclusão da alteridade a não ser que substituamos o dualismo – que Peirce descreve como a doutrina que “conduz sua análise com um machado, oferecendo como elementos finais pedaços não relacionados do ser” – pela doutrina da continuidade lógica, ou sinequismo. O pensamento dualista, que pautou a modernidade desde que Descartes, no século XVII, abriu caminho tanto para a ciência ocidental quanto para a vida cotidiana, é ilustrado pela retomada do secular debate sobre a autêntica identidade latino-americana. As vozes de dois pensadores, considerados pelo autor com “prope-pragmaticistas”, o filósofo espanhol Unamuno e o escritor argentino Borges, fornecem importantes evidências sobre como a crítica pragmaticista de Peirce ao dualismo pode e deve ser aplicada a um problema central nas Humanidades: como valorizar a identidade cultural na sociedade contemporânea sem excluir a alteridade.

KEYWORDS: *sinequismo peirceano; crítica ao dualismo; self como signo; identidade latino-americana*

pragmatism and the self: towards a vision of creative hybridism in the pampas

¹ Rosenthal's (2002) overview of the main contributors to pragmatist thought.

What can that “most distinctively American philosophical movement”¹ contribute to our understanding of such an intricate issue as the identity of the descendants of Europe’s consequential globalizing endeavor from late 15th century, namely Latin Americans? Such is the challenge I accept, in order to show the relevance of the doctrine of pragmatism as it was first developed by logician Charles S. Peirce (1839-1914). My procedure will be partly theoretical, partly historical, as I aim to apply Peirce’s semiotic original contribution to construe the mind as inseparable from sign action or semiosis, to some concrete examples involving the negotiation of human identity, as that element which is closest to a person, or to a certain community. In both senses of that term, identity is a community’s token of *distinction*: an objective difference, as well as the possession of a special, unique worth. Identity is construed in one of the texts I will consider as the pugnacious upshot of local forces – e.g. nationality, ethnicity, culture, religion or race – and thus is presented as being always lured by a dualistic, excluding strategy. Such a struggle can be transcended and integrated by the Peircean pragmatic doctrine of development of the self construed as a process which can only occur in steady communication with the Other. The consequence of dualism is, at times, can be almost deadly, as so many ethnic wars have shown us in the past century.

My story begins in 1900, when an intellectual from Uruguay, one of Latin America’s tiniest countries, that of the author of this paper, publishes a vibrant manifesto titled *Ariel*, an enlightened I *accuse*, against what he deems to be a deleterious globalizing enterprise, whose likely victim is that writer’s continent. José Enrique Rodó (1872-1917) fears Latin America’s cultural authenticity may fall prey to the gross, North American commercialism. According to Uslar Pietri, (1979: 20, quoted in DEVÉS VALDÉS 2004), this sentiment has been common to most “Hispanic Americans since the 18th century”, so much so, that it is possible to speak of “an ontological anguish of creoles, ceaselessly looking for themselves”. Rodó’s fierce, Americanist manifesto is discussed in this paper as a paradigmatic example of a dualistic strategy.

In contrast with the intellectual move represented by Rodó’s text *Ariel*, contemporaneously there is a solitary European voice that reflects upon a popular verbal artwork from the New World which in his view should not be construed as a sign of radical disunity, of the irreversible separation of Latin America from the Old World, but as a remarkable symptom of semiotic continuity. In Peircean terms, this take on this cultural issue may be interpreted as a synechistic success story. In a polemical, quasi-pragmatic fashion, Spanish philosopher Miguel de Unamuno (1864-1936) analyses the purport of Argentina’s major epic poem from the 19th century, *Martín Fierro* as “an integration of that which had been differentiated” (1986 [1894]: 26). This critical judgment embodies a central pragmatic tenet: all growth of meaning comes from the complexity of our

evolving public signs engaged dialogically with each other. In spite of the overt differences of their intellectual endeavors, Unamuno's and Rodó's reflections serve as a instructive frame for a still ongoing debate on the nature of the collective self, in the context of a globalized world. Thus I move on to the third intellectual contribution to this improvised conversation of mankind.

In one of his minor texts, a brief literary review, Argentinean writer Jorge Luis Borges (1899-1986) proposes an insightful analysis on the evils of dualism, and on the promise of a disillusioned though realistic humanism, at a tragic moment for mankind, the Second World War. Although, neither Borges nor Unamuno use the notion of pragmatism, I argue here for their status as prope-pragmaticists, that is, two intellectuals whose ideas deserve to be included in a more broadly defined doctrine of the study of meaning based on its consequences for human experience.

Be it the enormous territory appropriated and re-signified as *America* by European conquerors, or the world market disputed and seduced by huge multinational companies, like McDonald's or Nike, what we have is the endless debate between two visions. On the one hand, there is the outlook of a dualistic universe, wherein no long lasting or vital connection can be established among human beings, so the isolated individual is the model to be everywhere emulated. On the other, there is a synechistic vision which is capable of including the former, because for this view physical limits or accidental differences are not what really matters, but the unrestrained, evolving continuity between all there is. For the dualist thinker, the self is a received 'gift', something precious to be carefully preserved from the contamination of new-fangled ways, so that it can be passed unmodified down to coming generations. For the synechist, the self is an endless cooperative achievement which has no more fixedness than what is strictly necessary to envisage the consequences of our living concepts for our lives².

The fear of identity corruption expressed historically by the Latin American thinker Rodó in 1900, in relation to the supposedly deleterious sociocultural influence of the North American utilitarian neighbor is an influential historical example of the dualistic kind of thought which cannot envision a synechistically-based community, but longs for the supposed safety of sundering society in unrelated chunks, to paraphrase Peirce's (CP 7.570)³ vivid definition of dualism, as the doctrine which "performs its analyses with an axe, leaving as its ultimate elements, unrelated chunks of being."

Far from helping people to deal more effectively with the complexities of a multiracial and globalized society, a dualistic strategy cannot but fix rigidly each term of the identity opposition, in such a way as to surely miss what the meaning of the other is. What is even more worrisome is that this mindset impedes the coming together with the other in an unrehearsed dialogue

² I have borrowed this suggestive image and phrasing from Colapietro (1989: 41).

³ The convention of quoting Peirce with the notation CP x.xxx, referred to volume and paragraph in *The Collected papers of Charles S. Peirce* is followed here.

(OAKESHOTT, 1962). Besides the founding work by Peirce, the contribution of present-day thinkers of pragmatic thought such as Colapietro (1989, 1998) and Wiley (1994) is considered here to ponder on the relevance of pragmatic semiotic for the notion of identity and of self in our global times. As a tentative conclusion, I present a non dualistic, process-like view of identity, which is proposed as a way out of the “labyrinth of confusion caused by the traffic of identities”, García Canclini’s (1999: 93) terse and suggestive depiction of the endless and futile quest for authenticity and purity in Latin America. This unproductive endeavor has gone on for almost two centuries and it is doomed to fail, since it is “most hostile to synecism”, like other “crusades preached by philosophic cranks against this or that fundamental conception” (CP 7.570).

a pragmatic definition of the other as our legitimate interpretant

The evolutive historicity of interpretants obtains, properly, because the capacity of representation of the real through signs translates our human tendency of learning with experience. (IBRI, 2000: 31)

Our duty to agree with reality is seen to be grounded in a perfect jungle of concrete expediencies. (JAMES, 1963 [1907]: 102)

What follows seems rather a constructivist account of reality than the pragmatist description of it that it purports to be:

We may glimpse it [reality], but we never grasp it; what we grasp is always some substitute for it, which some previous human thinking has peptonized and cooked for our consumption. If so vulgar an expression were allowed us we might say that wherever we find it, it has been already *faked* (JAMES, 1963 [1906], 109, emphasis in the original)

Peirce would probably not agree with this statement made by his friend and fellow pragmatist, “the famed psychologist James” (CP 5.414), as he did not agree with other ideas of the most popular speaker for pragmatism in those days. Although not mainly or directly because of these divergences, Peirce did change the name of this theory of meaning and chose a new, charmless one, namely, “pragmaticism”, to discourage future kidnappers, as he wryly wrote (CP 5.414). For the creator of the pragmatic maxim, reality is more than merely glimpsed at, it is experienced, tasted, touched, smelled, acted upon, in a word lived through and through, on account of what Ransdell (1986: 68) has described as Peirce’s “doctrine of representative perception” (see CP 5.607), which solves the Kantian problem of an unknowable and unreachable real. To know life through its representations, iconic (qualitative), indexical (factual contiguity) or symbolic (interpretable in a habitual way), in no way diminishes our face to face or rather body to sign contact with the real. It is thus that we fulfill our human fate as semiotic tireless travelers of our surroundings. Peirce’s rainbow

metaphor (CP 5.283) explains that the world outside is both “a phenomenal manifestation of ourselves” – who are also signs, insofar as we participate in semiosis – and the manifestation of something external, which lies outside of signs, but which works its dynamic or forceful limit on our experience and knowledge through them.

Even though nowhere in the text in which Peirce proposes this new, safer term for his doctrine of meaning analysis does he hold William James responsible for having distorted his original idea, elsewhere (CP 8.81) he does criticize the dualistic and anti-synechistic account of the human self given in James’s *The Principles of Psychology*, which he takes pain to cite and then contradict: “No thought even comes into direct sight of a thought in another personal consciousness than its own. Absolute insulation, irreducible pluralism, is the law”. To the implications of such a doctrine Peirce (CP 8.81) retorts bluntly: “Is not the direct contrary nearer observed facts?” His own account is that James mistakes thoughts for “feeling-qualities”, which, of course, are not intelligible to anyone, not even to the one who has them. To be understandable, feelings must be embodied in some concrete token of a symbol, and only as such can they be interpreted by self and others. It is tempting to construe the neo-Kantian proposal of James, his construal of reality as being always “peptonized” by others, and therefore never reached in human experience both directly **and** mediately, as Peirce was wont to conceive it, as a corollary of the complete isolation of the self which was postulated by the American psychologist. This is an upshot of the Jamesian bias in favor of representationism against a carefully balanced presentationist *cum* representationist approach to meaning such as Peirce’s (CP 5.607), which Ransdell (1986: 68) considers in the light of iconic signs. By definition signs circulate always collectively, as part of the life (*psyché*) of a community, and our only access to outward reality and to our own self is through signs. However, signs do not digest or cook reality, leaving it forever altered, deprived of its true nature, creating thus a frustrating, tantalizing approach to the real which cannot be consummated. Quite on the contrary, in Peirce’s pragmatic and synechistic sign theory, reality strives to reveal itself as it is, albeit fallibly (CP 1.13; CP 1.148) through the intervention of signs.

In the above statement, the term “signs” by no means refers to words as a primary or higher realm of signification; the action of signs encompasses the entire universe, where psychic power evolves, that is, life as a meaning-engendering process. In her fine account of final causation, the kind of power which underlies signification, Santaella (1999: 503) brings together mind and the categorial analysis: “there is mind wherever there is triadicity; wherever there is a tendency towards learning, growing, or evolving there is mind, no matter how rudimentary its action may be.” In the Jamesian proto-constructivist or representationist biased view, what we get is only half of the story: human beings are doomed to remain forever banned from that holy of holiest, the authentically real. Instead of opening this realm for us, in all its multiplicity of

ever changing aspects, our signs would perversely close it off, only allowing us to have a distorted – “faked” – acquaintance with it. Where does this doctrine leave the human self? In an isolating “box of flesh and blood” (CP 7.591), as Peirce stated quite early in his writings. Or in the words of Colapietro (1989: 58): “the organism is not something in which the self is located. ... (it) is the means *through which* the self is able to address and be addressed by some other”.

Human identity, our sense of self, is always the product of local influence – the indexically-based context, which includes the genetic and the historical legacy – and of the symbolic transaction, the law-like behavior whereby we come to know ourselves through others. Globalization has simply pushed to its furthest historical degree a natural tendency in our human, semiotic constitution: all around us, things, events and people constitute so many semiotic affordances (GIBSON, 1986), namely, naturally complementary links for our understanding of ourselves and of otherness. Far from reality being “faked”, in the sense of being previously “peptonized and cooked” (JAMES, 1963 [1906]: 109), an idea which fosters the utopia of finding a raw real, one which is uncontaminated from any such an assimilation, Peirce’s synechistic process is radically alien to the notion of a profound, unbridgeable gap between human beings.

The contribution of pragmatism for understanding the notion of identity in a globalized world consists in helping us draw out the practical consequences and thus the meaning of this “hard word” (CP 5.464), of this fundamental “intellectual concept” (CP 5.8) of our times. The kernel of this doctrine is to assert that there is no possible action determined by our ideas, if it is not manifested in the lived experience of them: “it seems legitimate to identify *practical consequences* with experienceable consequences” (IBRI, 2000: 33). The semantic content of our selves cannot be detached from the upshot of our interaction in a community which, owing to the global enterprise, comprises the entire planet. Peircean pragmati(ci)sm provided us with a doctrine of thought for which what can be figured as a particular behavior does not entail the loss of any of its generality (IBRI, 2000: 32). To determine the purport of the self, be it in the Latin American context, or anywhere else for that matter, the kinds of behavior which we can predict as those that tend to fulfill the meaning of the self are never dualistic. Altericide (ANDACHT, 2000) is defined as the negation of the other as a requisite for the well being and survival of the (local) self. The hypothesis of this paper is that just as the meaning of any sign can only be found in a more developed sign generated by it, after being determined by the object⁴, likewise the meaning of the self is to be discovered in *the Other as our natural interpretant*. Our sole hope of self-understanding and of approaching the ideal of an unlimited community of inquiry, both in science and in the critical commonsensism based on everyday life experience, lies in this open and widening circulation of meaning among all of us, without any other restraints than those which our all too human fallibilism and material limits impose on us. Colapietro’s work on subjectivity in Peirce can be profitably quoted at this point:

⁴ The real is a limiting force which serves as the sole guarantee of the non-arbitrariness of sign growth.

A sign cut off from its future interpretants is a sign denied the possibility of realizing its essence; that is, the possibility of being a sign. Such a sign is the negation of semiosis; (...) thus, if the self is a sign and if it is cut off from its future developments, it has been denied the possibility of actualizing its essence; such a self is, in fact, the negation of selfhood. (1989: 77-78)

The following sections discuss dualism and synechism insofar as they serve as the basis for two different approaches to human identity. However, from the Peircean perspective adopted here, we must bear in mind that the latter comprises the former. From a historical viewpoint, I discuss a geopolitical doctrine which advocates Europe's early globalizing enterprise by vehemently denouncing what is conceived of as North America's semiotic invasion or "nordomania", which is construed by Rodó in *Ariel* as a violation of the Latin heritage, namely, Americanism. It never occurs to Americanists that the founding signs can grow richer through the dialogical interaction with the new signs, those which arrive from the fast developing north of the Americas. These are seen as radically altering the original, lawful constitution of the continent, the one which, in fact and in signs, arose as the often violent encounter of those early globalizers, and the signs they carried, with the native signs of the New World.

rodó and americanism: a winged spirit watches over our endangered symbols

From generation to generation, each nation hones and elaborates its nationalist theories, while science and machines multiply the uniformities of the world. Each practical endowment comes together with an ideal rebellion. HENRÍQUEZ UREÑA, "El descontento y la promesa" (1926), quoted by DEVÉS VALDÉS (2004).

Physical location and biological limitations furnish "an inclusive context in which semiosis must be situated", as Colapietro puts it (1998: 108). Such a constraint on sign action assures that there is no idealistic reductionism involved in Peirce's pragmaticist approach to meaning generation. The semiotic triadic model does not entail a denial of our tangible, empirical materiality. A simple way of demonstrating this may be found in a well known sign trichotomy, namely, that of the three types of signs which result from the Dynamic Object/Representamen relationship: icon, index and symbol. This is the fundamental link between the real which must be somehow represented, and thereby an effective limit of sign development, and the sign-medium through which the real manifests itself. Peirce's evolutionary account of the emergence of the self postulates its indexical nature, that is, the self as the kind of sign which points stubbornly and existentially to the object that is its physical origin. To explain his thesis, the semiotician uses a simple, imaginary accident, in which awareness of otherness dawns upon an infant who, literally, is experimenting with the limits of his body

and of his consciousness. Upon finding in the external world something quite different from what he had expected, a burning surface, the child is painfully taken aback. The event serves as a forceful indication of a natural border of his body, and it points to a brutal, unyielding sign of existence:

he touches [the hot stove], and finds the testimony confirmed in a striking way. Thus, he becomes aware of ignorance, and it is necessary to suppose a self in which this ignorance can inhere. So testimony gives the first dawning on self-consciousness. (CP 5.233)

The self comes about as an inference, not too differently from the way we arrive at the conclusion of a syllogism, although the human self embodies more than cool reason. Peirce strives to develop a non-Cartesian cognitive model: in a truly dialectical process body and mind function together; there is no rigid hierarchy between them but a synechistic integration of body, mind, and imagination. No sign can function unless it is embodied materially: “Since the mind is a symbol, and since anything in order to function as a symbol requires some form of embodiment, the mind is always embodied” (COLAPIETRO, 1989: 70). The external nature of mind, one of Peirce’s original contributions to the study of human cognition, helps us understand the relevance of all kinds of material signs for the self’s evolving process.

My revising of pragmatism in relation with the self as a semiotic process includes a detour to consider a literary myth, that of *Ariel*, the winged spirit which plays the role of a pagan angel in Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*. The magical creature was taken on loan over a century ago by the Uruguayan intellectual José Enrique Rodó, in an essay which bears the title of that sylph, which was published in 1900, and which became the founding stone of Americanism. Ever since, this literary and political symbol has not ceased to grow in complexity. Although in its origin this was an elitist discourse, the reflections of an intellectual which found ready echoes in other thinkers of the continent, the principle of continuity, the doctrine of logical continuity or synechism (CP 7.571), allows us to posit a “correlation between the individual and the social order (as) there is no break between selves” (CORRINGTON, 1993: 102).

We can take the seminal essay written by Rodó at the turn of the 20th century as a decisive meaning-effect of the identity issue in this continent, his way of coming to terms with the political commitment of that generation of Latin Americans, as they tried to resist the growing influence of the United States on the rest of the world. Their main concern was with the consequences this could have for the venerable European cultural heritage, which had functioned as an undisputed legacy for the then young nations of Hispanic America, even after their independence wars. More than a century afterwards, it has not been possible to escape the dualistic, oppositional matrix within which the influential essay *Ariel* was formulated. As an Americanist manifesto, *Ariel*

combines a critical view of North America, with an aristocratic bias and a strong nationalistic, local and Latin-based pride. This sentiment is the result of the conviction of belonging to the former colonizers' cultural matrix, of speaking and writing in their language, although they also acknowledge Latin Americans' political differences. It is something of a paradox that through his text Rodó developed a global, post-national kind of discourse; such was the purport of his critique of the North American globalizing drive, of the feared trend which the writer pejoratively described as "nordomania." Although in Rodó's time the now popular adjective "globalizer" was still not in use, he accused the North American mercantile, "utilitarian" expansionism of being the chief responsible agent of the endeavor to impose a single civilizatory model on all the nations of the world. His was a critical position which nowadays we identify with the anti-globalization movement. Due to its geographical vicinity, "nordomania" was felt as a considerable threat for the good cultural health of the southern portion of the continent.

Elsewhere (ANDACHT, 2004), I described the rhetorical strategy inaugurated with success by *Ariel* as "the Crusade of the Croissant", a now centenary movement whose major aim is to oppose fiercely the also century-old "Crusade of the Bun", its specular Other. The former denotes the semiotic endeavor of defense and of preservation of the Latin-European heritage in all its manifestations. These range from the spirit or civilization ideal that irradiates from "the golden spear of the Athena of the Acropolis" (RODÓ: 236)⁵, to mundane gastronomic practices such as the French-styled breakfast, or the mouth-watering European delicacies praised in an idyllic, nostalgic film (*Chocolat*, US/UK, 2000). The Crusade of the Bun owes its name to the kind of unitary, round and crustless bread piece that invariably accompanies the slab of ground beef sold in huge quantities by one of the world's largest chain of restaurants. This North American, multinational company from the fast-identically-reproducible-food line of business has given rise to the critical expression the "McDonaldization" of the world or the "McWorld" (BARBER, quoted in ROBERTSON 1998: 13). It is against this standardizing nemesis generated in the US that Latin American intellectuals often reflect and write about. Although the vast food empire created by the enterprising and visionary North American Ray Kroc had not yet been dreamt of when Rodó published the text which he dedicated to *The young people of (Latin) America (A la juventud de América)* – *Ariel's* subtitle – the bold enterprising spirit was already there, just waiting for technology and marketing to spread the new-fangled, powerful signs of consumption – mass media, entertainment, fast food – throughout all the nooks and crannies of the world, and this, of course, to the Latin American intellectuals' great anxiety and ceaseless reflection.

⁵ All the references to Rodó's work are keyed to the volume of his *Obras Completas* (1957), edited and prefaced by the Uruguayan critic and literary scholar Emir Rodríguez Monegal.

Scholars who study the development of Rodó's thought will surely find textual evidence of quite hostile sentiments concerning the growth of the North American socio-cultural influence, in some exalted passages which were written

almost ten years after *Ariel*'s publication, such as this one:

[T]he radical error [of the Latin American nations] consisted in the vanity of thinking that these absolute imitations [of the Anglo Saxon model] from people to people, from race to race are conceivable and well within the natural and the possible ... in forsaking the original and autonomous personality, which is entirely free to modify itself but not to deprive itself of its character, in order to douse and dim its own spirit into the spirit of other. (RODÓ, 1957 [1909]: 500)

Old Prospero's moral and civilization lesson to his young disciples in *Ariel* may be considered as the official birth certificate of the Crusade of the Croissant. It is a vehement defense of the conquerors' Greco-Roman cultural legacy, such as it was re-appropriated and re-signified by the Latin American descendants. The tone of solemn proclamation used by the Uruguayan is evocative of the French polemical classic *J'accuse*; it leaves little doubt about the purpose and genre of this work: [I]n the name of spiritual rights **I deny American utilitarianism that typical character that it wishes to impose on us as its essence and model of civilization.** (RODÓ, 1957 [1900]: 236, emphasis added, F.A.)

In *Ariel*, there are enough elements to develop an exalted cult of the first modern globalizing endeavor of the European, non-Anglo-Saxon colonizers of Latin America. The symbols, artifacts, and practices which originate in the north of America and travel to the south are construed by Americanists as a hard to resist, corruptive mercantilist temptation ("utilitarianism"). Insofar as they are alien to the high aspirations and the sublimity of traditional culture, the local drive to imitate the ways of this feared Other could not but exert a deleterious effect on the authentic way of being, thinking, and acting of the rest of America, on their true self and true symbols. Long before the traveling salesman Kroc bought the gastronomic formula from Mauricio and Ricardo McDonald, the humble brothers from San Bernardino, California, there were already disturbing intimations of a serious threat incarnated by the North American way of life and of commerce – the two being inseparable, in the aristocratic view of Rodó.

Evidence of the emotionally-loaded nature of the Americanist 'crusade' can be found in a remarkable misapprehension in *Ariel*; namely, Rodó's belief in the unlikely long-term success of the materialistic influence of "nordomania". Maybe a heartfelt devotion for some cultural goods, such as those of European origin and Latin American assimilation, is the cause of such blatant lack of perception in this keen thinker. Rodó makes a wholly failed prediction when he writes ironically about the unrealistic North American ambition to become the new cultural centre of the Western world:

Besides the relative insufficiency of their share of the education

of humanity that they are entitled to, their very nature denies them the possibility of hegemony. Nature has conceded to them neither the genius of propaganda nor the apostolic vocation. They lack that supreme gift of **gentleness** [*amabilidad*] – in the highest sense of that extraordinary capacity of empathy, with which the races endowed with a providential purpose of education know how to make of their culture something akin to the beauty of the classical Helena, in whom everyone believed to recognise features of themselves. (1957 [1900]: 236, emphasis in the original)

The rhetorical figure of the invidious comparison is used by Rodó as a further argument for his prediction of the unlikely diffusion of the American way of life to the rest of the world. The reader is invited to compare the different symbols of each globalization - the European version, and the contemporary North American one - on the basis of the different emotions that their respective, typical signs arouse for whoever contemplates them. Rodó (1957 [1900]: 236) contrasts the imposing feeling caused by the statue of the Athena of the Greek Acropolis with the mundane impact aroused by the “Liberty of Bartholdi” on the viewer. The intended comparison consists in an opposition between the sublime and the trite. Even if one admits, as Rodó does, that an imaginary traveler who arrives on the shores of New York could not but experience a powerful sensory experience, the completely different aesthetic nature of the feelings involved in such an experience is what the author aims at conveying through this ideological comparison.

Although publicity as we know it in modernity would only begin to develop some twenty years later, and marketing at an even later date than that, such a blatant error of judgment as Rodó’s cannot but call the reader’s attention. There is a complete incapacity to foresee what was to travel and impose itself so well from North America onto the rest of the world, more precisely from a modest-looking hill located “in that improvised west,” the region of North America most disdained by Rodó in *Ariel* (1957: 235). In fact, the North American semiotic irradiation reached the entire world, and its power and *modus operandi* may be summarized by conjuring three icons which came precisely from that most derided territory of the northern nation: the image of a mouse named Mickey, that of a blond actress named Marilyn (Monroe), and that of a young actor who died at the beginning of his fame, and whose name would become as famous as the kind of trousers which, unwittingly, his short-lived career in the movies would help immortalize: James Dean. Naïve, child-like entertainment and erotic enticement for men and women of the entire planet, therein lies the remarkable achievement of the civilization which Rodó predicted would not be able to spread and impose its symbols, since in his view this nation lacked the gift of making “of their culture something (...) in which everyone seemed to recognize features of themselves.” The symbol which sponsors the other three symbols that I mentioned above, and which lies on a modest hill in the west of

the United States, namely, Hollywood, has not stopped propagating its message *urbi et orbi*, and there is no evidence that in the near future it will stop doing so with similar or even greater success. Involuntarily, Rodó's *Ariel* gives us a negative, oppositional description of the specific talent which the nation that incarnates the Crusade of the Bun has been displaying in an unbeatable manner over three fourths of the past century, and in the new one as well. It is against this formidable North American talent that the intellectual successors of the founder of the Crusade of the Croissant continue to fight with great determination, if only moderate success.

unamuno and borges: prope-pragmaticists shine a light at the end of the tunnel of dualism

In this section of the article, I bring together the reflections of two voices in the desert, namely, that of a philosopher and of a writer who deserve to be known as quasi-pragmatic thinkers, thus the 'prope-pragmaticist' attribute in the title. Different as their positions and texts are, their thought is united by a lucid attempt to see life beyond the logical straitjacket of dualism. Both Unamuno and Borges imagine and conceive a collective self which does not consist in a deadly, isolating opposition, but instead, in a rich dialogic encounter wherein self and other grow inseparably in their meaning, just as their symbols do.

While Rodó's 1900 literary manifesto on the dangers of identity contamination by the gross materialistic culture which came from the north of America enjoyed the status of an instant classic, the other two texts I will analyze here never had such an impact on the general public. I will proceed in chronological order. Published in 1894 and surely a minor work of its author, Spanish philosopher Miguel de Unamuno (1864-1936), the insightful literary review "El gaucho *Martín Fierro*" constitutes the basis for my description of Unamuno as a **prope-pragmaticist**. By adopting this term, I follow Peirce's recommended practice for similar cases:

[J]ust as is done in chemistry, it might be wise to assign fixed meanings to certain prefixes and suffixes ... perhaps, the prefix prope- should mark a broad and rather indefinite extension of the meaning of the term to which it was prefixed. (CP 5.413)

The reason for extending the purport of 'pragmaticist' lies in the kind of implicit critique Unamuno makes of dualism, and in his account of Latin American identity in a truly synechistic spirit. He construes identity as a free flowing dialogue, a lively and inevitable hybridization with other currents of thought and culture. Maybe the fact that he himself did not belong to Latin America helped this prope-pragmaticist not to succumb to a recurrent continental sentiment which is over two centuries old, according to Uslar Pietri:

as from the 18th century, the main concern in the Hispanic mind has

been that of their own identity. Everyone who has considered in some detail the situation of these nations has agreed, somehow, in pointing out this feature. There has even been talk of the ontological anguish of the Creoles, who have been searching for themselves without pause. (quoted in DEVÉS VALDÉS, 2004)

A pragmaticist perspective based on a synechistic conception of meaning growth can take us out of the century-old quagmire of polemical and destructive antagonism. This is what Unamuno's text proposes, though not in those philosophical terms. In his review of *Martín Fierro*, the poem by Argentinean writer José Hernández, Unamuno praises its literary excellence, but does not spare a mordant critique of what he deems to be the mistaken Arielist vocation of many Latin American apologists of this popular epic poem. Although it is an anachronism to use the term 'Arielist' in connection with this essay, since Unamuno's text was published six years before Rodó's, my use of it is justified, because, according to Unamuno, it was a defense of their own identity at the expense of the Other's culture-shaping influence. Such a denial, wrote the Spanish philosopher, did not contribute to a better understanding of the real Latin American identity.

Besides being accurate, Unamuno's critique is akin to Peirce's synechism, which posits the generation of meaning as a continuous process, the dialectical evolution through which men and signs "reciprocally educate each other" (CP 5.313). Our evolving identity is inseparable from the workings of sign action. By dismantling the binary opposition formulated by Rodó's *Ariel*, which posits local identity in an isolated, belligerent opposition to that of North America, we can do justice to the notion of the self being "not so much (a) gift (but) an achievement" (COLAPIETRO, 1989: 41), which is always a collective and evolving endeavor. This involves a semiotic metabolism with no predetermined end, and no clear beginning. Only if we are able to leave behind the dualistic perspective, can the true nature of the self emerge as an uninterrupted increase in the complexity of our signs in contact with those of the other.

After expressing regret for the lack of critical recognition given in Spain to the *Martín Fierro*, Unamuno points out the fallaciousness of some of the local praise awarded to that poem. In Argentina, it was celebrated by nationalistic intellectuals not on account of its being the popular, fine artwork it was, in the philosopher's view, but for supposedly embodying the first exclusively Latin American cultural creation, a kind of literary independence manifesto, the blossoming of a genuine, local identity, wholly separate from the cultural heritage of their former colonizers:

[*Martín Fierro*'s] beauty so suffices that it is a shame that so many Americans strive so hard to praise it for motives which are alien to the art and, what is even worse, which are false and illegitimate. Among these

illicit motives ... we must include the ridiculous allegation that *Martín Fierro* belongs to a kind of literature which is **exclusively Argentinean**, the bud of a new spirit which differentiates Argentineans from the other Spaniards, and that it is written **in the Argentine national language** (1986 [1894] :21-23, emphasis in the original)

I do not intend to enter into the details of the literary controversy; however it pays to consider in some detail this argument. Unamuno construes the Argentine poem as a variety, albeit a magnificent and indigenous one, of the finest Spanish epic works such as the medieval *Poem of the Cid*. In a polemical vein, he writes: “*Martín Fierro* is, of everything from Hispanic America that I am acquainted with, the most profoundly Spanish” (1986 [1894]: 26). What seems to be the sturdiest evidence for the alien nature of this poem in relation with the mother country and language, namely, its many indigenous words – “*biguás, caicobés, cipós, ceibós, curupís, chajás, mburucuyás, mamangás, ñandús*” – turns out to be flimsy. While it is true that these words, he admits, do not belong to Spanish, neither do they belong to the language of the Argentineans, since they pertain to the native dwellers of America (1986[1894]: 24). He then praises the excellence of this Latin American literary creation, while he regrets the barren literary landscape which prevailed at that time, in the European matrix of America. Unwittingly, Unamuno wrote an anticipatory reflection on what was to become, seven decades later, the acclaimed literary **boom** of this continent (e.g. the magic realism of García Marquez’s *One hundred years of solitude*).

It is this argument for the continuity between the Hispanic tradition and its offshoot on Latin American soil that provides an alternative, synechistic account to the dualistic, oppositional conception of national identity, to the cyclical duel between *Ariel* and Caliban:

And there [in Latin America] our adventurer continued to be what he had been here [in Spain]. The gaucho was the hero of the war for the American independence, **that independence that has separated us to unite us in a higher and deeper union, in a kind of integration of the differentiated, as an evolutionist would say it.** (UNAMUNO, 1986 [1894]: 26, emphasis added, F.A.)

What in military and political terms was an irreversible, violent separation, from a semiotic perspective never stopped functioning as a network which, beyond anyone’s will, kept former colonizers and colonized united, different but related, estranged but familiar. Human identity as a signifying power is the tendency to understand others and oneself as part of a process of sign growth, and to create a way of life on the basis of that understanding. That is why the poem *Martín Fierro*, which bears a strongly indigenous flavor, can also be undeniably and pragmatically Spanish. Probably, an “evolutionist” like Peirce would back up the bold assertion of the prope-pragmatist Unamuno. Pragmatically, to be

a self implies the integration of the differentiated in an endless synthesis which brings about greater complexity than that of the components which make up the semiotic system⁶. Indeed, to say it with Colapietro (1989: 73), in his own account of the self, there is not a symbiosis but a dialogical relationship between self and other: “The self is distinguishable but not separable from others; indeed, the identity of the self is constituted by its relations to others”.

⁶ For a detailed discussion of Unamuno’s text in the light of Peirce’s semiotic theory, see Andacht 2000.

Our next prope-pragmaticist comes from Rodó’s continent, an Argentinean whose essay dates from the start of the Second World War. In it, Borges recalls an autobiographical episode, which is a common trope of his short stories. Borges writes about the time when he was invited to speak at an assembly organized to “confound anti-Semitism”, an initiative that he heartily endorsed. However, with disillusion and wistfulness, he observes that this worthy goal failed:

There are several reasons for me not to be an antisemitist ... the difference between Jews and non Jews seems to me, in general, insignificant; at times illusory or imperceptible. Nobody, on that occasion, wanted to share my opinion; everyone swore that a German Jew is vastly different from a German. In vain, I reminded them that that is precisely what Adolph Hitler says; in vain, I hinted that an assembly against racism must not tolerate the doctrine of the Chosen Race; in vain I proposed the wise statement by Mark Twain⁷. (1996: 102)

⁷ The English translation of all the texts by Borges is mine, F.A.

Here is Mark Twain’s reference, which is only partly reproduced by Borges: “I have no color prejudices nor caste prejudices nor creed prejudices. All I care to know is that a man is a human being, and that is enough for me; he can’t be any worse”⁸. The point of this melancholy anecdote then becomes apparent in Borges’ text:

In this book as in others, H.G. Wells makes a vehement appeal for us to remember our essential humanity, and to refrain from mean differential traits, no matter how pathetic or picturesque they may be. In truth, this admonishment is not exorbitant: it just asks from the nations, for their better coexistence, what an elementary courtesy demands from individuals⁹.

⁸ The quoted passage comes from an essay called “Concerning the Jews”, which is part of the collection *The Man That Corrupted Hadleyburg and Other Stories and Essays* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1900). As usual, Borges is allusive and partly misleading in his reference to it: he only gives the collection’s title.

Borges (1996: 102) ends his review of the *Guide to the New World. A Handbook of Constructive World Revolution*, by stating that “Wells, in the work whose commentary I have sketched, urges us to rethink the history of the world without any preference of geographical, economic or ethnical kind.” In his understated style, Borges has made a powerful statement concerning one of the greatest dangers of racism, or of the logic of exclusion in general, in any of its historical manifestations. Synchism enables us to overcome the straitjacket of dualism at work in such deadly exclusions. Against the dualistic tendency to suppress otherness by asserting our identity in radical opposition to others,

⁹ The other book under review which is alluded to in the title is Bertrand Russell’s *Let the people think*.

Borges' text illustrates narratively Peirce's (CP 7.571, quoted in COLAPIETRO, 1989: 64) synechist *caveat*: we must **not** say "I am altogether myself, and not at all you", because the doctrine of continuity holds that

[Y]ou must abjure this metaphysics of wickedness. In the first place, your neighbors are, in a measure, yourself, and in a far greater measure than, without deep studies of psychology, you would believe. Really the selfhood you attribute to yourself is, for the most part, the vulgarest delusion of vanity. In the second place, all men who resemble you and are in analogous circumstances are, in a measure, yourself, though not quite in the same way in which your neighbors are you. (BORGES, 1996: 102)

These century-old ideas of Peirce evince their present validity and relevance, if we only consider the muted but ferocious social conflict depicted in so many media products of popular culture (see ANDACHT, 2005 for a semiotic study of a Brazilian example).

conclusion: pragmatism as an analytical tool for unblocking the road of self inquiry

What kind of contribution can pragmatism bring to the century-old quest for the real, authentic self in that part of the world that proudly and ambiguously bears the symbol of otherness in its proper name: *Latin* – to evoke the dead language of the conquerors' ancestors – together with *America* – to honor the name of one of those brave European navigators?

A pragmatic synechistic approach to our signs of identity involves abjuring those minor differences which Borges, in his text on racism, wisely reminds us not to make so much of, since they can only lead us into further ignorance of the other, and into undoing otherness and our own self in the process. Without this semiotic ingredient, without considering the Other our natural interpretant, there is no possibility of a true self-understanding, the logical mechanism which brings us the news of difference – be it gender-based, ethnic, religious or racial. It is the self construed as an evolving sign that embodies the healthy growth of meaning, of signs of all kinds. Such is the natural way of our signs, unless semiosis be reduced to a reified particular identity, as Wiley's (1994) thesis convincingly demonstrates. The operation of "upward reduction of the self" (WILEY, 1994: 157) makes it impossible to express the constant changes we undergo when in contact with others. Nobody can be woman, or black, or white, or Latin American, all of the time, for every imaginable purpose in life. The self as a semiotic process is a continuous achievement and not as a fixed once and for all given. That is why the self cannot do without the active exchange with others and with otherness. In a globalized world, this need, which has always been the fate of our signs and of our selves, as Peirce understood in his early formulation of pragmatism in the 1870's, has become even more acute.

To dream of ourselves in just one all-purpose, static identity runs counter to commonsensism, and, *a fortiori*, to critical common-sensism (CP 5.452).

Adopting a critical stance towards the North American tendency to claim the centrality of particularities at the expense of our common humanity, which is part of the postmodern politics of minorities and oppressed groups, neo-pragmatist sociologist Wiley (1994: 38) develops a crucial argument for the present paper: the self as the universal human capacity of meaning-generation may perish under the proliferation of our specific identities. Noble and just as the aspirations of those emancipatory movements are, there is a risk involved in not giving due consideration to the self; namely, to confuse our partial identities with our encompassing and evolving semiotic nature. The consequence thereof is to jeopardize that which ought to be construed as the central value of modern democracy: the universal rights to which the self is entitled above our partial, historical identities. The pragmatic construal of the self presents it as a real, living sign situated among signs, an evolving process which is therefore capable of including all aspects of life without privileging any specific commitment for all times and occasions.

Based on the work of Colapietro (1989) and of Rochberg-Halton (1986), Wiley (1994) provides a timely warning against the excessive enthusiasm of the political struggle of postmodern activists, who consciously renounce an all encompassing self in the name of an ever growing plurality of “particular identities”:

[P]ragmatism’s theory of the self as the foundation and location of human rights does the same job [as the contemporary politics of identity], and in my opinion, with fewer political risks. In particular, the theory of democracy and legal equality, especially for minorities, becomes less solidly grounded once the level of the self is theoretically annihilated, for then rights have no clear location. In other words, the politics of identity, at the present time. (WILEY, 1994: 16)

Although it was published over a decade ago, I find Wiley’s neo-pragmatic approach to that “center of purpose and power” (COLAPIETRO, 1989: 92) as a most apt description of the self, one which is theoretically based on Peirce’s categorial analysis of experience and of meaning. The natural development of any sign - and the self is a sign - is to turn into a full-fledged symbol, namely, the embodiment of an evolving rule of interpretation. The harm entailed by the preeminence of our particular identities is to remain at an indexical stage of development, to focus excessively on those minor contextual differences that may end up concealing our communal interpretive endeavor. A similar thesis is defended by another neo-pragmatist, American logician Susan Haack, when she questions the supposed benefit of denouncing the political interests of inquiry for the multicultural cause:

As the stress on the interests of this or that class or category of person has waxed, our sense of our common humanity and our appreciation of individual differences has waned, until we are in danger of forgetting that fallible inquiry – the ragged, untidy process of groping for, and sometimes grasping, something of how the world is – is a **human** thing, not a white male thing. This is very sad. (1999: 14)

A complementary and related notion is the pragmatist philosopher's argument against "a feminist epistemology" which presupposes "a distinctively female cognitive style":

All **any** human being has to go on, in figuring out how things are, is his or her sensory and introspective experience, and the explanatory theorizing he or she devises to accommodate it; and differences in cognitive style, like differences in handwriting, seem more individual than gender-determined. (HAACK, 1998: 126)

Rodó's early 20th century intellectual struggle to redeem the Latin American specific, historical identity, in belligerent opposition to the North American one, is but an early rehearsal of what postmodern thinkers are at present trying to carry to its bitter end. Be they feminists, regional identity advocates or anti-globalization fighters, what these representatives of the politics of progressive differentiation seem not to perceive is that in a world where the growth rate of interpretants and thus of semiotic complexity of society has never been so high, our only hope lies in the attempt to find our way inside this maze of identities. All of us have a lot to gain from of a new, broader sense of self, one which does not try to extirpate the Other as an alien element which endangers our true, authentic meaning, simply because there is no such proper or authentic meaning to be found all by ourselves.

Any plausible purport regarding human identity, in a globalized world, should be dealt with as something which necessarily goes beyond our own body, beyond our own individual mind, and which can only be grasped elsewhere, as it develops in the signs of the Other, in the others construed as our more developed signs. Spain and Latin America can only gain by acknowledging that together with the identity struggles of the past, of the 19th and of the 20th century, there was also a longer-lasting semiotic revolution going on. If we can apply Peirce's logical device for calculating purport as the probable experienced behavior entailed by the true belief in a concept, namely, the pragmatic maxim (CP 5.403), to these new challenges, to our peaceful coexistence, then we will come to terms with the notion of an evolving, not locally constrained self. Particular and universal forces alike are part of the historical and geopolitical determinations of who we are at a certain point in time, and who we are always in the process of becoming. Naturally, this tension can never be resolved with a dualistic axe, as Peirce so well understood over a century ago, because that

strategy will always leave separate, unaccountable chunks of being, which will not bequeath us any satisfactory sense of purpose or of a possible shared future.

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