

Peirce, Semiotics, and Psychoanalysis

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9 Further Consequences of a Singular Capacity

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My purpose here is to supplement ideas presented in "Notes for a Sketch of a Peircean Theory of the Unconscious" (Colapietro 1995b).¹ Teresa de Lauretis has explored some of the same territory, though in an angle quite different from the one that I adopted in "Notes for a Sketch." While I used Peirce's categories of firstness, secondness, and thirdness as a set of interrelated heuristic clues for exploring the phenomenon of the unconscious,² de Lauretis used his general concept of interpretant and specific notion of habit change to suggest how Freud might be read in light of Peirce and, conversely, how Peirce might be read in light of Freud. Her approach and mine are by no means exclusive; it is reasonable to suppose that they are complementary. But, whereas my own categorical approach begins at a high level of generality (the categories being by definition concepts of the utmost generality [see, e.g., 5.43]), de Lauretis's approach commences at a more specific and more specifically semiotic level.

In this chapter, I (1) approach the unconscious from the angle of de Lauretis's highly suggestive reading of Freud *vis-à-vis* Peirce (i.e., her reconfiguration of the psychoanalytic notion of the unconscious *vis-à-vis* the Peircean notion of interpretant); and (2) relate, though only briefly, the results of this pointedly semiotic investigation to the conclusions of my prior categorical inquiry. Accordingly, I revisit here the Freudian notion of the unconscious, and I do so once again from a distinctively Peircean perspective. But rather than relying primarily upon Peirce's heuristic set of categories, I follow de Lauretis's lead and turn principally to his nuanced conception of interpretant (Shapiro 1983; Savan 1987-88; Liska 1990).

Setting the Stage: Dismantling Two Classifications

Peirce offers several distinct classifications of the interpretant, but he returned to two in particular time and again in his efforts to identify the effects wrought by semiosis. In both *Alice Doesn't* (1984) and *The Practice of Love* (1994), however, de Lauretis apparently limits her attention to but one classification, that of the emotional, energetic, and logical interpretant. In fact, she does implicitly bring into play the other classification, but does so in such a way as to blur the distinction between the final or ultimate interpretant, on the one hand, and the logical interpretant, on the other (1994, 300). For she focuses on the final logical interpretant without noting that this notion results from the intersection of two distinct classifications of what Peirce calls "significate effects." In one classification (the one upon which de Lauretis explicitly draws), the *logical* interpretant is distinguished from both the *emotional* and the *energetic* interpretants; in the other, the *final* interpretant (also called the *ultimate*, or *normal* interpretant) is distinguished from both the *immediate* and the *dynamical* interpretants. In what is perhaps Peirce's best-known articulation of the former classification, he himself presents the ultimate logical interpretant as though it were simply the name of a class of interpretants within a single classification rather than that of an intersection between two distinct classifications. But this intersection is not appreciated if these classifications are conflated.

Only confusion can result from the fusion of what should be kept distinct, even (perhaps especially) if what is conceptually distinct can be concretely united. The ultimate logical interpretant names the unity of that which is in principle distinguishable, to wit, the interpretant as general in nature and the interpretant as the destined terminus of the deliberative process. By drawing explicitly upon Peirce's two distinct classifications of the interpretant rather than simply the one on which de Lauretis focuses (by considering the unconscious in light of immediate, dynamic, and normal or final interpretants as well as emotional, energetic, and logical interpretants), and also by emphasizing that the notion of final logical interpretant is a conceptual node resulting from the intersection of the two classifications (Short 1996, Savan 1987-88), we will be in a better position to appreciate what is involved in reading the Freudian unconscious in light of Peircean semiotics. Moreover, rather than simply relying on the conceptual resources provided by this Peircean framework, we will introduce the notion of a quasi-ultimate logical interpretant. Such an interpretant is one that in some respects enjoys the status of a truly ultimate logical interpretant but that in other respects fails to be a "deliberately formed, self-analyzing habit" (CP 5.491). The notion of such an interpretant is implicit in both Peirce's own writings (see,

e.g., CP 5.479) and de Lauretis's use of those texts, but it needs to be made explicit.

Like de Lauretis, I too stress the personal unconscious as a nexus of constitutive dispositions, a set of habits by which the unconscious and, more inclusively, subjectivity are constituted as such (see, e.g., CP 6.228).³ That is, both the unconscious and the subject are constituted by a unique history of concrete involvements with other human agents and, significantly, through the mediation of these agents, with the natural world. Repression no less than subjectivity emerges as a result of the way others intervene in one's life and, in turn, the way one responds to such interventions and indeed solicits them in the first place (think here of the young child endangering itself and thus eliciting a response from a care giver). Both emerge and take determinate shape as an inevitable consequence of social interactions. Consequently, I also emphasize that the personal unconscious is an evolved and evolving nexus implicated in a unique history, and that this irreducibly singular history is,⁴ in its turn, embedded in a wider social history (de Lauretis 1994, 303).⁵ But this nexus evolves largely by means of signs. The crucial connection here is brought into focus when de Lauretis makes the following suggestion:

When Laplanche and Pontalis explain that in Freud "unconscious wishes tend to be fulfilled through the restoration of signs which are bound to the earliest experiences of satisfaction" and that the "restoration operates according to the laws of primary processes" (*The Language of Psychoanalysis* 481), I see no reason why it would be wrong to infer that those early experiences could have resulted in signs whose final interpreters were unconscious habits. Unconscious wishes, therefore, might be thought of as the signicate effects of those early experiences as well as causes for the re-presentation — be it through symptom-formation, hallucination, dream images, or fetishes — of the signs that fulfill(ed) them. [302]

There is, in fact, no reason for contending that such an inference is illicit. But a final interpretant of the sort suggested in the passage just quoted needs to be distinguished sharply from what Peirce intended by the ultimate logical interpretant.⁶

This point of disagreement rests upon substantial agreement regarding important matters. My agreement with de Lauretis resides partly (but only partly) in seeing (1) that the Peircean notion of interpretant is an extremely fruitful one, (2) that the Peircean construal of logical interpretant as habit-change is equally fecund, and (3) that almost all of the sorts of habit change most important for understanding subjectivity involve imagination and fantasy. In effect, de Lauretis is tracing out some of the consequences of the human capacity to forge certain associations, to link

certain images with one another, and then to connect this image with that feeling, this fantasy with that desire—in sum, the distinct human capacity to take habits of a highly complex character. But there is a need to trace out these consequences in stricter accord with some pivotal notions in Peirce's semiotic theory.

At least in anthroposemiosis (Deely 1994), the taking of habits includes acquiring propensities to realize certain fantasies (de Lauretis 1994, 309) and also to imagine certain realities. But these specific tendencies are, at bottom, highly complicated instances of a ubiquitous tendency, the habit *found throughout nature* of taking habits. What distinguishes the various kinds of natural beings from one another is the habits they exhibit, including the degree, manner, and rapidity with which they divest themselves of old habits, arm themselves with new ones, and integrate the new with the old. According to Peirce, "The highest quality of mind involves greatest readiness to take habits, and a great readiness to lose them"; this quality "implies a degree of feeling neither very intense nor very feeble" (CP 6.613). In other words, this capacity entails a measure of consciousness below that of the most acute sensations (e.g., intense pleasure or pain) but above that of our quasi-automatic reactions resulting from the unimpeded operation of effective habits in familiar circumstances.⁷ The sharpness of such sensations is likely to arrest action, whereas the fluidity of such reactions is likely to require minimal consciousness. The most manifest characteristic of matter is the seemingly absolute reluctance to lose old habits and to take new ones. What links matter and mind—what provides the *tertium quid* between material and mental substances or agencies—is the presence of habits and, beyond this, the tendency (however slight and thus imperceptible) to take new habits (Savan 1987–88). What is manifest in the case of mind is minutely true, but largely hidden, in the case of matter.⁸ The truly cosmic (or universal) tendency to acquire novel dispositions is, when we turn to *Homo sapiens*, a truly dramatic tendency.⁹ The focus of de Lauretis's interpretation is to trace out the consequences of certain aspects of this dramatic tendency. Here I trace out some further consequences of this singular capacity.¹⁰

Classifying Signs, Objects, and Interpretants

Peirce devised numerous classifications of signs (see, e.g., Burks 1949; Sheriff 1989). His general theory of signs is nothing if not a record of taxonomic experiments, focusing above all else on the sign itself (see, e.g., CP 2.254–64 and 8.343). But, in addition to these taxonomies, we encounter in his writings a classification of the object and also several clas-

sifications of the interpretant.¹¹ He insists that "it is clearly indispensable to start with an accurate and broad analysis of the nature of a Sign" (Peirce 1977; cf. CP 8.345). But this very analysis yields components (the object and the interpretant) which themselves call for classification, and the classifications of sign, object, and interpretant intersect to generate possibilities of drawing fine-grained distinctions among semiotic phenomena.

The Sign in Itself. A sign can be taken as a first: it may be considered in itself, apart from anything else—in particular, apart from either its object or the series of interpretants flowing from the interaction between the sign and its object. According to Peirce, "A Sign may *itself* have a 'possible' Mode of Being"—or "its Mode of Being may be Actuality: as with any barometer" (1977, 83). Finally, it may be that mode characteristic of habits, would-be's or would-do's. In other words, the sign in itself may be a tone, token, or type: qua possibility, it might be called a *tone* (though Peirce was not entirely satisfied with this locution); qua actuality, a *token*; and qua would-do, *type*.

The Sign in Relation to Its Other. Anything functions as a sign, in part, only insofar as something else generates, constrains, or determines the functioning of that thing (e.g., the sunflower turning toward the sun bears witness to the presence of the sun, the function of its turning being essentially linked to the function of sunlight [CP 2.24; Esposito 1979]). The sign is, in other words, essentially related to something other than itself.¹² Though semiosis is a process exhibiting an irreducibly triadic structure, it is one encompassing irreducibly dyadic relationships; the most important of these dyads is the relationship between sign and object. The secondness inherent in semiosis is most manifest in this relationship. Moreover, the two grades of secondness—degenerate and genuine—are discernible in this relationship, for "it is usual and proper to distinguish two Objects of a Sign, the Mediate without, and the Immediate within the Sign" (Peirce 1977, 83). The relationship between sign and its immediate object is one of degenerate secondness, whereas that between sign and its dynamical object is one of genuine secondness.

The classification of the object is truly central to Peirce's approach to the semiotic; but it is, in contrast to the various classifications of signs and the two principal classifications of interpretants, readily comprehensible and largely uncontroversial (cf. de Lauretis 1994, 304). The *immediate* object is the object as it is represented by some sign or (since every sign ideally generates an interpretant-sign until it generates an interpretant-habit) by some sequence of signs, whereas the *dynamical* object is the object insofar as it can act as a functionally independent constraint on the process of interpretant-generation. The distinction between imme-

diante and dynamical object is a formal distinction, since one and the same being can be both kinds of object. If such a formal identity were precluded, then truth in a sense strenuously advocated by Peirce would also be precluded.¹³

For many purposes, our representations of reality, especially if granted the degree of vagueness and generality requisite for the purpose(s) at hand, coincide with the realities represented. For our more refined purposes, it is crucial to keep in mind the distinction between the way reality is represented by us and the way it is apart from our representations (in Peirce's terminology, the distinction between the immediate and the dynamical object, respectively). Peirce's formal distinction between the two kinds of semiotic object makes his theory of signs the tool of a fallibilist: our representations of reality are always potentially other than the realities represented (Colapietro 1997). What we say about things might be quite different from the way those things would reveal themselves to us: the way we take things to be may be mis-takings. So, commonsensical realism and a still all-too-unfamiliar fallibilism are both given their due in the Peircean conception of the semiotic object,¹⁴ an object at once representable within the modest limits imposed by most mundane purposes potentially mistaken within these same limits. By using the adjective *mundane* here, I intend to underscore the down-to-earth character of what is being championed in this context.

The distinction between the immediate and dynamic object is, thus, intended to secure the status of a standard by which our assertions and, more generally, our representations might be judged. If our assertions and representations are self-enclosed—if the very possibility of exposure to corrective influences is ruled out—then processes of self-correction are also ruled out. Self-correction requires corrective others; it demands the bold yet humble willingness to expose oneself to the other as other. Though scientific inquiry is a self-consciously fallible process, all semiotic processes are—no matter how blindly groping, no matter how unconsciously executed—ones in which something analogous to the distinction between immediate and dynamical object can be discerned. Though scientific investigation characteristically involves deliberate experimentation, human semiosis always involves unwitting trials and unconscious processes: the scientist is the self-conscious, practical fallibilist, whereas human agents are generally unwitting and unconscious fallibilists. This is the reason they are *impractical* fallibilists! Their errors are too costly: time, energy, and their very selves are spent too freely for so little. Their negotiations with their inner drives and outer circumstances extract from them a payment which more courageous, attentive, sustained agents might avoid.

Interpretants as Significant-Effects of Signs and Their Objects. In *The Sense of Grammar: Language as Semiotic*, Michael Shapiro describes Peirce's theory of the interpretant as "the most important part of his semiotic" (1983, 45). "The theory of the interpretant is," according to David Savan in his *Introduction to C. S. Peirce's Full System of Semiotic*, "the most extensive and important of Peirce's theory of signs. His pragmatism and his theory of method . . . fall within it. Many other aspects of his philosophy . . . are closely related to it" (1987-88, 40).¹⁵

In general, the interpretant is (to use one of Peirce's own descriptive expressions) the "proper significant effect" of a sign-process: it is the upshot of such a process. The results of semiosis are ordinarily multiform, for signs prompt *feelings*, incite *actions*, and produce *other signs* as well as other forms of generality (e.g., desires, hopes, fears, expectations, and habits [CP 5.486]). Here the word *actions* designates not only outward, bodily actions but also those purely inward exertions, those mental soliloquies strutting and fretting on the stage of imagination. Signs, through the complex mediation of these feelings, exertions, and further signs, shape the sensibility and condition the character of the sign-user. Insofar as feelings are proper significant effects of a sign-action, they merit the name of *emotional* interpretant; and insofar as exertions are such effects, they merit the name of *energetic* interpretant. But neither the immediacy of feeling nor the singularity of action can, either itself or solely in conjunction with the other, explain meaning. For meaning is inherently general; in contrast, immediate feeling is unique and therefore ineffable, while brute action is singular and thereby antiversal. The *logical* interpretant must be of a general nature, otherwise the logical processes would be impossible.

Whereas the logical interpretant is marked by its inherent generality, the *ultimate* logical interpretant is defined by its provisional stability. The *ultimate* logical interpretant is the *terminus ad quem*, the point at which semiosis terminates, for the time being. What proves sufficient for the time being might, in fact, also prove so for the indefinite long run, especially if the logical interpretant is that of a sign of a high degree of vagueness and generality. But the more determinate a sign is in these two respects (i.e., the less vague and general a sign is), the more open any actually established ultimate interpretant is to being modified or even eradicated.

One way to clarify further what Peirce intends by the ultimate logical interpretant of a sign is to contrast this interpretant with "the first logical interpretants" (CP 5.480-81). Whereas readiness "to act in a certain way under given circumstances and when actuated by a given motive is [what we generally mean by] a habit, the word *belief* might be reserved for 'a

deliberate, or self-controlled, habit'" (CP 5.480).¹⁶ In a sense, the first step toward the formation of cognitive habits is conjecture, or hypothesis. Peirce goes so far as to suggest that "every concept, every general proposition of the great edifice of science, first came to us as a conjecture. These ideas [guesses] are the *first logical interpretants* of the phenomena that suggest them, and which, as suggesting them, are [themselves] signs" (CP 5.480). But between these first logical interpretants and any ultimate one there can be discerned or, at least, must be posited intervening logical interpretants:

In the next step of thought, those first logical interpretants stimulate us to various voluntary performances in the inner world. We imagine ourselves in various circumstances and animated by various motives; and we proceed to trace out the alternative lines of conduct which the conjectures would leave open to us. We are, moreover, led, by the same inward activity, to remark different ways in which our conjectures could be slightly modified. The logical interpretant must, therefore, be in a relatively future tense. [CP 5.481]

If not arrested or deflected, this process of interpretant-generation terminates in a relatively stable cognitive (or intellectual) habit.¹⁷ But, given the remarkable plasticity of human physiology, and also given the inevitable conflicts among the objects desired and thus pursued by human agents, the habit-interpretants generated by sign-actions are often only very problematic orientations of the agents in whom they are inscribed to some sphere of engagement. In light of their actual experience, it is more often than not understandable why these, rather than other, habits were generated; but, in light of wider experience and deeper reflection, it is frequently clear that other dispositions would better serve these agents. The circumstances in which their habits were formed did not provide sufficient opportunity for deliberative imagination. At the very least, what I am saying here concerns agents from the perspective of *their own* motives and aims. But it might also concern these motives and aims themselves. For given more inclusive experience and adequate reflection, these might show themselves to be infantile or self-debilitating or deficient in some other way.

As noted earlier, Peirce offers an alternate classification of interpretants. He classifies interpretants not only as emotional, energetic, and logical, but also as immediate, dynamic, and normal (CP 8.343). Some interpreters of Peirce suppose that these are but two different ways of expressing the same classification; others recognize that the classifications are different but disagree with one another about how the two schemes are related. But the best expositors of Peirce's semiotic (e.g.,

Ransdell, Savan, Shapiro, and Short) respect the differences between these two classifications. They are correct in doing so.

Most relevant to our purposes is the possibility that only the two classifications taken together can provide the conceptual resources for describing the complex processes to which I have just alluded, namely, those processes in which sign-actions generate self-frustrating or self-destructive interpretant-habits. A dramatic example of such self-frustrating interpretant habits is repetition compulsion. My concern is not with specific phenomena but with the general mechanism(s) by which such habits are formed or, more exactly, with the Peircean notions through which the formation of these habits might be described and, to some extent, explained.

Semiosis, as an irreducibly triadic process, generates an irreducibly triadic result (the interpretant), the character of which is unintelligible apart from the processes out of which the result emerges and also the processes made possible by this result.¹⁸ To be sure, Max H. Fisch is correct when he asserts that "the fundamental conception of semiotic is not that of sign but that of semiosis" (1986, 330). But sign-action is frequently effective action; when it is effective, it modifies the agent-medium by and in whom it occurs.¹⁹ (In calling any action effective, all that I mean to convey is that it produces results, it makes a difference, not that it produces desirable results or makes a beneficial difference.) In Peirce's semiotic, then, the emphasis on process does not result in an eclipse of product. For the triadic structure of semiosis replicates itself above all in the structure of its result—its interpretant, or, more precisely, the open-ended series of three-termed forms generated by the dynamic interaction between sign and object. Parallel to the distinction between immediate and dynamical *object*, Peirce distinguishes between an immediate and dynamical *interpretant*: "It is . . . requisite to distinguish the *Immediate Interpretant*, i.e., the Interpretant represented or signified in the Sign, from the *Dynamical Interpretant*, or effect actually produced on the Mind by the Sign" (CP 8.343). It is also necessary to recognize, in addition to these two kinds of interpretant, "the *Normal Interpretant*, or effect that would be produced on the mind by the Sign after sufficient development of thought" (CP 7.343).

All forms, but especially the distinctively human forms, of semiosis are *essentially* fallibilistic. By their very nature they are liable to error. Since lying implies an intent to deceive, signs in general are misleadingly defined as anything that might be used to lie (cf. Eco 1992); however, since signs by their very nature secure the possibility of error (they *are* that by which the possibility of error comes into being), they are in general properly defined as anything that might generate an illusion or instigate a mis-

take. But, in order to account for the process of generating mistakes and illusions, it is necessary to articulate the ways in which the evolution of interpretants can be arrested or, in other ways, maimed.

This task itself presupposes that there is, albeit within very wide margins, a *normal* course of development, one more or less destined to take place.²⁰ Given, on the one hand, the constitution and exigencies of human organisms and, on the other hand, the contours and constraints of the environment in which such organisms are required to secure their existence and enact their impulses, the development of interpretants is subjected to various, frequently contradictory, pressures.²¹ But the cumulative effect of these persistent pressures, physiological and psychological as well as environmental, operates in such a way as to favor—at least in the long run—certain habits of feeling, action, and habit-taking. Semiosis is a process that always rests on the operation of established habits and occasionally culminates in the formation of new habits or, at least, the alteration of existing ones (even if the alteration amounts to nothing more than the strengthening or weakening of those habits). But some habits are debilitating while others are facilitating.

The ultimate logical interpretant is the habit that ultimately *would be* generated by semiosis, though the ultimacy here is merely provisional. It marks the provisional, yet nonetheless real, closure of a process, albeit a closure which itself opens possibilities and thereby exposes the newly established habit to unforeseeable vicissitudes and even fatal challenges. In addition, the habit that happens to be established by a particular semiotic process is not necessarily a suitable or facilitating habit. It might poorly serve the human agents in just that immediate environment in which it was generated and to which they suppose it to apply. In contrast to whatever habit just happens to be established, we might imagine the habit that given sufficient experience and reflection would be established. Peirce calls this the *normal* interpretant and characterizes it as the "effect that would be produced on the mind by the Sign after sufficient development of thought" (CP 8.343; cf. Savan 1987-88 and Short 1996).

If we use the Peircean notion of interpretant to interpret the psychoanalytic conception of the unconscious, we ought to look beyond the ultimate logical interpretants of signs. As necessary as the idea of such interpretants is for framing a distinctively Peircean understanding of the unconscious, it is not sufficient. There are instinctual tendencies and acquired habits that block the formation of ever more flexible, nuanced, and effective habits of feeling, acting, and imagining. The defense mechanisms are, at once, unavoidable, effective, and futile strategies by which the body-ego attempts to conduct an ongoing series of incredibly complex negotiations.²² These mechanisms are *unavoidable* in the straightforward sense that, given the force of instinctual tendencies, the influ-

ence of cultural forces, and our extended ineptness in negotiating harmonious agreements among these ubiquitous pressures, we cannot help but devise all too hasty and all too crude strategies for coping with these pressures. These mechanisms are generally *effective* in the minimal sense that they allow the conflict-ridden organism to escape being a paralyzed agent: they permit the body-ego to continue its ongoing negotiations with these conflicting demands, even if only in a precarious and even debilitated manner. In brief, they permit the body-ego to go on. Finally, these mechanisms are ultimately *fruitful* and worse—self-frustrating—in the sense that the minimal successes attained via the all too partial, precarious, and costly negotiations of the body-ego are destined to prove to be useless or self-stultifying as one moves through the world. What Peirce says about the instinctual beliefs might profitably be recalled here: The critical commonsensist acknowledges that “our indubitable beliefs refer to a somewhat primitive mode of life” (CP 5.511). In fact, their authority is limited to such a sphere: “While they never become dubitable in so far as our mode of life remains that of somewhat primitive man, yet as we develop degrees of self-control unknown to that man, occasions of action arise in relation to which the original beliefs, if stretched to cover them, have no sufficient authority” (ibid.). We might say that their power far outstrips their authority.²³

A quasi-final interpretant of this sort occupies the functional position but does not exercise sufficiently the defining functions of such a habit; in many cases, it may be a randomly formed, self-concealing disposition. Often, these hidden dispositions result in deformed deliberations or simply debilitating actions; hence, not a deliberately formed habit of action, but deeply deforming acts of deliberation (including acts by which the very possibility of deliberation is undermined) characterize so many quasi-ultimate logical interpretants. Any habit that would arrest or, worse, destroy opportunities for cultivating deliberately formed, self-analyzing habits, but which would do so in its role as quasi-final interpretant, would have a very important status within the economy of our psychic lives.

Psychoanalytically understood, the unconscious encompasses the repressed; in turn, the repressed is itself both the effect of largely unconscious processes and the cause of a vast portion of our mental life. In order to get at the unconscious in this sense, it is crucial to establish a distinction between the repressed and the unrepressed (i.e., the repressed insofar as it becomes available to the conscious deliberative agencies of those essentially problematic beings—enculturated human organisms).²⁴ Indeed, apart from such a distinction, the repressed is devoid of meaning. One way to establish and maintain this distinction is by recourse to Peirce's notion of normal interpretant, the habit-interpretant which

would result from sufficient experience and reflection (from experience sufficiently wide and deep, from reflection sufficiently sustained and courageous). Peirce contrasts the normal interpretant to both the immediate and the dynamical interpretant: whereas the *immediate* interpretant is “the Interpretant represented or signified in the Sign,” the *dynamical* interpretant is the “effect actually produced on the mind by the Sign” (CP 8.343). The actual effect might be and, in fact, ordinarily is different from both what is immediately presented to unreflective consciousness and what would be deliberately adopted by reflective subjectivity.

Experience marks and, indeed, maims us in ways more complex and less accessible than those noted by the inevitably superficial consciousness of the experiencing subject. Ordinarily, the headlong rush of lived experience provides insufficient opportunities to note much beyond the immediately salient features of the complex situations in which the vulnerable body-ego is precariously situated and selectively preoccupied.²⁵ Also, the purpose at hand channels attention and activity in some more or less definite directions, deflecting it from countless other possible ones. Finally, there is hardly ever simply one, perspicuous purpose channeling attention and activity: unavowed tendencies are intertwined with conscious objectives to produce complex patterns within the psychic tapestry. The immense egoism involved in elevating voluntary attention (the body-ego insofar as it is a conscious source of its own purposive exertions) to the status of absolute authority, even over its own doings and resistances, is an immense error, especially since it blocks the road of inquiry.

Consciousness includes far more than the field of voluntary attention; in turn, mind encompasses far more than the operations and forms of consciousness. Psychology is, accordingly, too narrowly defined as the science of consciousness, let alone of that specific form designated as voluntary, reflexive attention. Not simply the forms, functions, and fissures of consciousness, but primarily the operation, acquisition, and integration of habits (processes with which consciousness is only sometimes interwoven) are the foci of this science. Peirce asserted, “For if psychology were restricted to the phenomena of consciousness, the establishment of mental associations [including dissociations; cf. CP 5.476ff. and de Lauretis 1994, 301], the taking of habits, which is the very market-place of psychology, would be outside its boulevards” (CP 7.367).

The Taking of Habits and the Habits of Imagining

As noted above, Peirce maintained that the capacity to acquire new habits and, as part of this, to shed old ones is found throughout nature, not only in the biological world (cf. de Lauretis 1994, 302). He insisted that “habit

is by no means exclusively a mental fact. Empirically, we find that some plants take habits. The stream of water that wears a bed for itself is forming a habit. Every ditcher so thinks of it" (CP 5.492; cf. Savan 1987-88). At the very center of Peirce's guess at the riddle of the universe is his generalization that "three elements are active in the universe," namely, chance, law, and habit-taking (CP 1.409). "Such is our guess of the secret of the sphinx" (CP 1.410).

Biological evolution is only a relatively recent and rare exemplification of a cosmic process. Human development, ontogenetic as well as phylogenetic, needs to be seen against a backdrop of evolutionary processes, ranging from the most inclusive level (the evolution of the cosmos itself) to the most immediate level (that of the particular cultures in which the individual organism is implicated). What distinguishes the human animal from other species is the manner in which humans acquire habits as well as the manner in which contingent, unstable yet paradoxically inescapable, tenacious habits constitute human subjectivity.²⁶ The habits constitutive of our subjectivity are, at once, contingent and unstable as well as inescapable and tenacious. Although it is, for example, contingent upon circumstances that we acquire one language rather than another, it is inescapable that we acquire the language spoken to us as infants (etymologically, nontalkers). Furthermore, although even our most deeply rooted habits can be uprooted and, to that extent, cannot be counted as absolutely secure (e.g., the loss of one's capacity to recognize one's own name), all habits exercise a tenacity, a capacity to take growing hold (sometimes tyrannical control) of the body-ego.

The inescapability of contingent habits and the tenacity of alterable tendencies are salient features of our psychic development. So too is our acquisition of habits not only by means of repeated outward exertions but also as the result of singular private fantasies. This acquisition of habits is frequently mediated by the exercise of imagination: fantasy—the dream of possibility, of what might be—continually, persistently, seductively intervenes in our psychic lives in such a way as to influence both what is and what would be (CP 8.216; de Lauretis 1994, 309). In Peirce's words, "The *will be's*, the actually *is's*, and the *have beens* are not the sum of the reals. They cover only actuality. There are besides *would be's* and *can be's* that are real" (CP 8.216). In general, what we count as real is ordinarily a complex intersection of these three distinct modes of being (the possible, the actual, and the real as distinct from the inclusively Real). The book on the table is an actuality. But it is also a possibility—say, the possibility of being entertaining and at the same time instructive. We *imagine* that the book might be nothing less than and perhaps even more than that; it *might be* the work destined to change one's life. Finally,

it is a set of what are, in effect, habits: the letters and other marks (including the spaces) on the page are themselves would-do's and would-be's.²⁷ In their presence, the competent reader would be induced to trace series of interpretants in some directions and not in others; though the marks on the page are not rigidly and narrowly determinative of the directions (let alone a single direction) in which interpretants are generated, they *dispose* competent readers to move along certain paths and not others (cf. Eco 1992; also Rorty 1992).

To repeat, what we count as real is usually a complex intersection of all three modes of being. But, in the distinctive phases of our actual experience, one or another ontological modality is likely to be predominant. For example, when the book is first perceived as one object among several others on the table (when it confronts us most forcefully as an object—a *Gegenstand*, that which stands over against us), even if the object is immediately, unhesitatingly, recognized as a book, it is above all else an actuality. In contrast, when we take the book in hand as a complex pattern of interwoven symbols—as an integrated set of interpretant-generators—it confronts us predominantly as a reality in the narrow sense (not the inclusive sense of Reality, the sense encompassing possibility and actuality as well as reality). Our perceptual experience of the book as an actual object in our visual field is an experience marked by secondness: the book confronts us as *both* other than the objects with which it is immediately juxtaposed and other than ourselves. Our experience of imagining the book as a source of enjoyment and illumination is one marked by firstness: it confronts us as a possibility. Finally, the experience of reading the book is, especially if the process attains the fluency of pleasurable activity (CP 5.113), one marked by thirdness: the book is a stream of interpretants in whose currents we are caught up and carried along (cf. Ransdell 1979).

The imagining of possibility is rooted in our instinctual nature and nourished by our cultural inheritances and individual experiences. According to Peirce, "Human instinct is no whit less miraculous than that of the bird, the beaver, or the ant. Only, instead of being directed to bodily motions, such as singing and flying, or to the construction of dwellings, or to the organization of communities, *its theater is the plastric inner world*, and its products are the marvelous conceptions of which the greatest are the ideas of number, time, and space." (MS 318: 44; my italics; Colapietro 1989, 114-15).

The imagining of what *might be* is fantasy in its most rudimentary sense. The imagining of what might be in such a way that the image of the possible absorbs and controls attention with the same force and authority as the percept of the actual is fantasy in its most characteristic

form.²⁶ Such imagining is itself an experience; it is a process of actually *living through* something (cf. Schrag 1969). Experience, in this basal sense, is appropriately named by the German word *Erfahrung*. But dreaming is an experience in which the most salient feature of experience — the confrontation of self and not-self — is highly attenuated; in other words, it is an experience in which the self is so thoroughly absorbed in its own images that the sense of otherness, of actuality, is eclipsed by the sense of intimacy, and also that of involvement. The phenomenology of fantasy would reveal that, for the experiencing subject, the dream is not felt to be in the dreamer but that the dreamer is in the dream (as we so significantly say, “she is lost in her dream”). Of course, this is in line with Peirce’s own insistence that thought is not so much in us as that we are in thought; that is, we are enveloped in signs. The dreamer is so thoroughly *in* the dream — so intimately absorbed in the concrete images of the particular fantasy — that she does not feel that she is in the dream. Such a feeling would require a felt sense of difference between dreamer and dream; but what distinguishes, above all else, the experience of dreaming from other modes of experience is exactly the absence of such a felt distance, the lack of the two-sided consciousness so generally predominant in virtually all other modes of experience. As with the dancer and the dance, the dreamer and the dream are one. Their actually being one renders possible other possibilities (one fantasy engenders countless others). Beyond this, their actually being one tends to render actual both the tendency to reimagine this absorbing experience (to return to this lived fantasy) and the tendency to actualize our private fantasies in our social relationships. Or, if not to actualize such fantasies in these relationships, at least to allow these fantasies to color these relationships. Insofar as the fantasies are unconscious, they of course operate quite apart from the consciousness and control of the person in whom they have taken root.

We acquire habits through imaginary as well as actual exertions. A singular imaginative flight might establish a habit as effectively as repeated outward actions. In its distinctively human form, then, the capacity to take habits encompasses both the capacity to acquire habits by means of imaginative experience (experienced fantasies, lived dreams — call them what you will) and the capacity to develop habits of imagining (Colapietro 1989). My habits of action bear the stamp of the acts of my imagination. But this is so largely because I am instinctually and culturally disposed to live imaginatively, to become absorbed in fantasies, and indeed to be transformed by images. One way in which Peirce himself makes this point is to assert that “every sane person lives in a double world, the outer and the inner world, the world of percepts and the world of fancies” (CP

5.487). Our actual lives involve ceaseless transitions from an order of insistent percepts and irrevocable exertions and also, conversely, from an order of pliable images and reclaimable deeds. Just as the shock of actuality can prompt a withdrawal into imagination, an imaginary performance might influence our actual engagements (CP 5.486, n. 10).

According to Peirce, “The whole business of ratiocination, and all that makes us intellectual beings, is performed in imagination” (CP 6.286). It might even be that ratiocination is properly described as a species of imagination, distinguished from other species by its function (the representation of reality) and form (the criticism, correction, and control of its own products and processes). To imagine that reality might be different than we habitually imagine it to be is, on the one side, to put imagination in the service of reality and, on the other, to envision reality itself as something accessible only through imaginative processes. At the second, or abstract, level of clarity, the real and the merely imagined are sharply distinguished (the real being defined in opposition to a signment of anyone’s imagination); at the third or pragmatic level of clarification, however, the interplay between reality and imagination comes into focus. For what is real at this level of clarity is *not* independent of thought in general; it is not knowable apart from the wild flights of theoretical imagination so prominent in the actual history of scientific investigation.

In one sense, then, dreams *are* such stuff as meanings are made on; and it is a sense Peirce himself would not hesitate to endorse. But, in another respect, it is to the generation and kinds of interpretants that we must turn, if we are to make sense out of meaning. It is also these semiotic processes and functional varieties to which we must turn to make sense out of our very selves.

Toward a Formally Semiotic Approach to the Unconscious

While a categorical description of the unconscious prepares the way for a semiotic approach, such a description certainly does not constitute such an approach. In order to undertake an explicitly and formally semiotic approach to the unconscious, it is necessary to draw upon the definitions and classifications proper to the self-conscious study of sign-generating processes. One of the virtues of Teresa de Lauretis’s creative appropriation of Peircean semiotic is the way that this appropriation explicitly draws upon the central notion of the ultimate logical interpretant. But, in the best tradition of American pragmatism, she puts Peirce to work: she uses the tools that she finds in his semiotic toolbox. The specific focus of what she does not hesitate to call a theoretical fantasy is the complex semiotic processes by which lesbian subjectivity is constituted.

Even though my account in this chapter is at a more specific and specifically semiotic level than the categorical approach of my earlier paper, it is quite far from the level of specificity on which de Lauretis is, for the most part, working. But my principal objective has been primarily to make more fully available to psychoanalytic and other theorists the conceptual resources of the Peircean semiotic. At a yet later time, I do hope to work out in greater detail a semiotic explanation of human subjectivity. But like Peirce himself, I am "a convinced Pragmatist in Semiotic"; in part what this means is that the notion of habit (including an account of how habits are formed and the ways they are deforming) must play a central role in working out the details of this explanation. Accordingly, this chapter might be viewed as a sketch of a part of that more ambitious undertaking.

Conclusion

The plasticity of our biological constitution is revealed in various ways, not the least of which is that our instinctual impulses—even the most tyrannical of these—do not drive us in any fixed direction. In other words, our instinctual impulses have variable objects, variable across different cultures and even across the exceedingly short span of an individual's personal history. The habits inscribed within our physiological beings by the centuries-long struggles of our biological ancestors are, in their characteristic functioning, largely nothing more than the rudimentary structures out of which more complex habits are generated. Our instincts are incomplete and inchoate; they evolve in the direction of more determinate dispositions via semiotic processes. Signs give rise not only to other signs of the same character but also to habits of a markedly different nature than these seemingly ephemeral processes. What is in itself transient is, in its effect (its proper significant effect), often far from transient.

Unquestionably, then, our instinctual impulses are *radically* transformed by the inescapable pressures of cultural practices. The pressures of these practices are staggeringly vast and various. On the one hand, the prohibitions, admonitions, encouragements, etc., of the authoritative representatives of these cultural practices and, on the other, the promptings, aversions, fascinations, etc., of our largely opaque instinctual nature thrust us into an ongoing series of complex negotiations and renegotiations. The fabric of our very subjectivity is woven out of these renegotiations. The habits of our being are the more or less lasting stitches in this fabric. While these stitches are among the most intimate aspects of our selves, they are in great measure the work of other, often hidden, hands. The recognition of this fact does not entail the denial of our agency;

rather, it identifies one of the principal tasks to which human agency must commit itself, if it is to approximate the Peircean ideal of self-mastery.

Notes

1. These ideas were originally presented on June 13, 1994, in Berkeley, California, at the Fifth Congress of the International Association for Semiotic Studies—Association Internationale Sémiotique (IASS-AIS). At that same meeting, Teresa de Lauretis presented her own provocative and insightful reading of Peirce in light of Freud and, in turn, Freud in light of Peirce. While my earlier "Notes for a Sketch" focused on the Peircean categories, this chapter focuses on the crucial notion of interpretant. Hence, this treatment draws more explicitly on Peirce's semiotic conceptions, as the earlier treatment drew more heavily on his phenomenological categories.
2. This expression, "the phenomenon of the unconscious," is curious, if not oxymoronic, for the unconscious is that which by its very nature refuses to put in an appearance. It is the antiphenomenal.
3. Human subjectivity is here understood to be a split being, a being split into a multilevel consciousness (CP 7.540) and an unfathomable unconscious (CP 7.554). In this view, subjectivity includes the unconscious. Augusto Pozzolo correctly stresses that "in Peirce alterity is found within the very subject who is an open dialogue between the sign and interpretant" (1985, 23). Indeed, the unconscious is a system of habits included within a wider system of dynamically interacting dispositions.
4. In *The Practices of Love*, de Lauretis brings the historical character of human subjectivity into sharp focus when she explains that, by history, she means "the particular configuration of discourses, representations, and practices—familial and broadly institutional, cultural and sub-cultural, public and private—that the subject crosses and that in turn traverse the subject, according to the contingencies of each subject's existence in the world" (1994, 303).
5. Often Peirce appears to slight and, on occasion, even to deny the importance and efficacy of individual agents. The individual as such appears to be reduced to a process or function controlled by forces other than itself. According to Peirce, there are laws that more or less determine how material and cultural circumstances influence human existence and conduct. "But these laws are not of the nature of mechanical forces, such that the individual and the spirit of man is [sic.] swallowed up in cosmical movements, but on the contrary it is a law by virtue of which lofty results require for their attainment lofty thinkers of original power and individual value. You cannot silence or stifle or starve one of them without a loss of civilization from which it never can wholly recover" (CP 7.275).
6. Peirce leads himself to misinterpretation here, for he in one place defines the ultimate logical interpretant as a self-analyzing habit. More fully, he declares that "the deliberately formed, self-analyzing habit—self-analyzing because formed by the aid of the exercises that nourished it—is the living definition, the veritable and final logical interpretant" (CP 5.491). So understood,

it is difficult—if not impossible—to distinguish between the ultimate logical interpretant and the normal interpretant. But it is imperative to insist upon this distinction, even if some texts seem to imply their identity and, beyond this, if they happen in some cases to overlap or entirely coincide. The ultimate logical interpretant is formally distinct from the normal interpretant; even so, there are some instances in which what counts as the one will also count as the other.

7. In Peirce's writings, one of the principal meanings of *consciousness* is feeling to be conscious is to be sentient (Colapietro 1989).

8. Peirce characterized himself as a Schellinglike idealist. In this conception of matter and mind, Peirce's affinity to Schelling is evident.

9. This tendency is dramatic in a twofold sense: in the sense, first, of what is noteworthy or remarkable and, second, of what exhibits the structure of a story.

10. For readers unacquainted with Peirce, let me point out that one of his most important essays was an early paper entitled "Some Consequences of Four Incapacities." In "Certain Faculties Claimed for Man," Peirce launched a critique of Cartesianism and, in particular, of our alleged capacities (or "faculties") to know reality intuitively, to know ourselves introspectively, to think without signs, and to frame a conception of an unknowable thing-in-itself. In "Some Consequences," he traced out some of the important implications of denying that we possess such faculties. The title of this chapter is obviously a play on the title of Peirce's article.

11. To say that Peirce offers his classification of objects and of interpretants *in addition* to his classification of signs themselves is somewhat misleading, for it does not convey the extent to which his taxonomies of object and interpretant are devised in conjunction with his taxonomy of signs; for example, in a letter to Victoria Lady Welby, he asserts—immediately after, first, distinguishing the immediate and dynamical object and, then, distinguishing the immediate, dynamical, and normal interpretant—that these distinctions provide the bases for recognizing "ten respects in which Signs may be divided" (CP 8.343).

12. This point requires qualification, for all that is necessary is that a sign be formally and functionally other than its object (not that it be actually other than its object). Peirce in effect qualifies this point when he asserts that

in order that anything should be a Sign, it must "represent," as we say, something else, called its Object, although the condition that a Sign must be other than its Object is perhaps arbitrary, since, if we insist upon it we must at least make an exception in the case of a Sign that is a part of a Sign. Thus nothing prevents the actor who acts a character in a historical drama from carrying as a theatrical "property" the very relic that the article is supposed merely to represent, such as the crucifix that Bulwer's Richelieu holds up with such effect in his defiance. On a map of an island laid down upon the soil of that island there must, under all ordinary circumstances, be some position, some point, marked or not, that represents *qua* place on the map, the very same point *qua* place on the map. [2.230]

13. In a manuscript from ca. 1906 (i.e., at the time when Jamesian pragmatism was gaining a wide audience), Peirce stated, "It appears that there are certain mummified pedants who have never waked to the truth that the act of knowing a real object alters it. They are curious specimens of humanity, and as I am one of them, it may be amusing to see how I think" (CP 5.555).

14. Foundationalists persist in seeing fallibilism as a variety of skepticism, while skeptics tend to view it either as a form of crypto-foundationalism or as a skepticism afraid to accept the implications of its own insights. But, from the perspective of fallibilism itself, neither of these characterizations are, by a long measure, fair.

15. To Lady Welby, Peirce describes his own investigations of signs as broader than hers: while her signification focuses on the relationship of signs to their interpretants (Peirce 1977), his own work in semiotic was primarily concerned, at least at the outset, with the relationship of symbols to their objects. But he was "forced to make original studies into *all branches* of the general theory of signs" (Peirce 1977, 80–81, *my italics*). Even so, Savan's claim stands.

16. Peirce is not consistent in this usage, for on more than a few occasions he uses the term *belief* to designate any cognitive habit, no matter how that habit is formed.

17. The reason for qualifying these habits as cognitive or intellectual is made clear by Peirce's insistence that "it is not all signs that have logical interpretants, but only intellectual concepts and the like; and these are all either general or intimately connected with generals. . . . This shows that the species of future tense of the logical interpretant is that of the conditional mood, the '*would-be*,' or would-happen (CP 5.482).

18. Teresa de Lauretis contends that "Peirce names interpretant the dynamic structure that supports the nexus of object, sign, and meaning, as well as the process of mediation itself. A series of interpretants, or 'significate effects' (I insist on this term which conveys the processual and open-ended nature of meaning), sustains each instance of semiosis, each instance of the unending process of mediations and negotiations between the self and the world" (1994, 300).

19. The human organism is not simply a passive medium in and through which sign-actions take place of their own inherent dynamic; nor is it in absolute control of even its own cognitive processes. The human organism is, at once, a *medium* in and through which sign actions take place to a significant degree of their own accord and an *agent* from which self-controlled actions emanate and, thus, to which deeds are properly attributed (cf. Colapietro 1989, 38).

20. The Peircean notion of destiny is central but problematic: it is central to his theory of inquiry and, indeed, his vision of the cosmos, but it is problematic in at least a twofold way. First, it is not easy to understand exactly what Peirce intends by his advocacy of this notion; second, it is not clear that the notion is tenable.

21. The exigencies to which I am referring here are both constitutional and adventitious exigencies. Examples of the former are the need for food, water, activity, stimulation, and the like; examples of the latter are the imperative desires for sexual stimulation of a certain sort, etc. In between constitutional and ad-

ventitious exigencies are such needs as those for enduring companionship, for esteemed work, and so on.

22. Teresa de Lauretis uses the term *negotiation* to describe the processes of semiosis by which the human organism comes to terms with the now conflicting, now complementary, demands of its world and its own being. The word also connotes the work of diplomats. For a development of a connection between semiosis and diplomacy, see Colapietro (1995a).

23. My friend and, in this instance, editor, Joseph Brent, objects that this construal of the unconscious does not work. He further suggests that to make it work one would have to reconstruct either Freud or Peirce. Of course, he is right. So I must acknowledge that the account being offered here entails a reconstruction of Freud, but little or no modification of Peirce's own views regarding semiosis and mentality.

24. One reason to describe enculturated human organisms as "essentially problematic beings" is that such organisms are problems unto themselves; another reason is that the problematic character of their own existence is itself problematic (is the problem itself the solution or the solution to be found in the jettisoning of the problem?).

25. William James, who was a friend and supporter of Peirce, offers several brilliant metaphors to evoke this aspect of experience. In one place, he states, "Life is in the transitions as much as in the terms connected; often, indeed, it seems to be there more emphatically, as if our spurts and sallies forth were the real firing-line of the battle, were like the thin line of flame advancing across the dry autumnal field which the farmer proceeds to burn" (James 1977, 212-13).

26. After identifying eight or so levels of self-control, Peirce concludes that "there are certainly more grades than I have enumerated. Perhaps their number is indefinite. The brutes are certainly capable of more than one grade of control; but it seems to me that our superiority to them is more due to our greater number of grades of self-control than it is to our versatility" (CP 5.533; Colapietro 1989, 109ff.). He goes on to claim that language itself is a faculty explicable as "a phenomenon of self-control" (CP 5.534).

27. Just as silence is constitutive of spoken language, space is essential to written language.

28. Three fine treatments of Peirce's theory of perception are Bernstein (1964), Hausman (1990), and Santuella (1993). No one of these, however, considers the extent to which perception is a fantasy-laden process. I do not know of any scholar who has worked out the details of construing perception as such a process.

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10 Gender, Body, and Habit Change

Teresa de Lauretis

That a famous library has been cursed by a woman is a matter of complete indifference to a famous library.
—Virginia Woolf

With very few exceptions, gender and the body have been a matter of complete indifference to semiotics, but a central concern of psychoanalysis. As I have argued elsewhere that Peirce's notion of habit effectively bridges the theoretical divide between semiotics and psychoanalysis (de Lauretis 1984), here I explore the relation of habit to gender.

In the 1970s and up to the early 1980s, the study of gender was virtually an exclusive concern of feminist studies, as was the notion of sexual difference, with which it was initially synonymous. Men, whether straight or gay, did not write about gender then; the first scholarly works in gay studies were works of history and sociology. Gender was women's problem, as was "sexual difference," and these were the terms by which women analyzed and articulated the sociosexual definition of Woman as different from the universal standard that was Man. In other words, gender was the mark of woman, the mark of a sexual difference; women's difference, which entailed women's subordinate status in society and a set of character traits derived specifically from their anatomical/biological sex. Gender was the sum of those traits, whether they were thought to be innate, supplied by nature, or imposed by culture and social conditioning.

The single most influential feminist essay on gender, Gayle Rubin's "Traffic in Women," which defined the mutual implication of sex and gender in the concept of a "sex-gender system," was published in 1975 in a volume by the explicit title *Toward an Anthropology of Women*. Rubin begins her essay by stating that "a 'sex-gender system' is the set of arrangements by which a society transforms biological sexuality into products of human activity, and in which these transformed sexual needs are satisfied" (1975, 159). And, after a brilliant discussion of Lévi-Strauss and La-