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# Peirce's evolving interpretants

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**Abstract:** The semeiotic of Charles Sanders Peirce is irreducibly triadic, positing that a sign mediates between the object that determines it and the interpretant that it determines. He eventually holds that each sign has two objects and three interpretants, standardizing quickly on immediate and dynamical (or real) for the objects but experimenting with a variety of names for the interpretants. The two most prominent terminologies are immediate/dynamical/final and emotional/energetic/logical, and scholars have long debated how they are related to each other. This paper seeks to shed new light on the matter by reviewing the numerous manuscript drafts where Peirce develops the latter nomenclature while attempting to introduce his pragmatism to a general audience. It then goes on to examine an additional set of interpretants, intentional/effectual/communicational, and shows that the three different trichotomies can be understood as complementary, rather than redundant or conflicting.

**Keywords:** interpretant; meaning; Peirce; pragmatism; semiosis

## 1 Introduction

A longstanding disagreement among scholars of the semeiotic of Charles Sanders Peirce concerns the relationship between two different trichotomies of interpretants that he identifies in his writings: immediate/dynamical/final and emotional/energetic/logical. Many have understood them as merely different names for the same three interpretants, while others have advocated at least four alternative positions (Bergman 2004: 370–386, 2009: 119–127; Jappy 2017: 62–72):

- Dynamical interpretants as actual effects of signs are divisible into emotional, energetic, and logical interpretants as feelings, actions/exertions, and thoughts/signs (Fitzgerald 1966: 76–83; Savan 1988: 55–65).
- Emotional interpretants are immediate interpretants; energetic interpretants are divisible into immediate and dynamical interpretants; and logical

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interpretants are divisible into immediate, dynamical, and final interpretants (Zeman 1977: 247–249).

- Immediate, dynamical, and final interpretants as possible, actual, and habitual effects of signs are divisible into emotional, energetic, and logical interpretants as feelings, actions/exertions, and thoughts/signs (Short 1981: 212–219, 1996: 493–516, 2007: 178–206).
- Emotional, energetic, and logical interpretants are the manifestations of immediate, dynamical, and final interpretants in concrete human semiosis (Liszka 1990: 20–26, 1996: 25–26, 120–123n12; Lalor 1997: 34–38).

The immediate, dynamical, and final interpretants appear with some terminological variations in numerous letters, articles, and notebook entries that Peirce wrote from 1904 to 1909. By contrast, he discusses the emotional, energetic, and logical interpretants only in the second through fifth major variants of R 318.<sup>1</sup> These are the last in a long series of drafts, all composed in 1907 and totaling more than five hundred handwritten pages, for an introductory article entitled “Pragmatism” and intended for a magazine with a general audience; initially *The Nation* and later *The Atlantic Monthly*, both of which ultimately declined to print anything. The most likely chronological sequence was R 320, R 324, R 319, R 322, and R 321, all in February–March; then the first three versions of R 318 in March–April, followed by the remaining two versions some months later.<sup>2</sup>

To date, the only published portions of any of these manuscripts are from the third, fourth, and fifth versions of R 318 (CP 5.11–13, 5.464–496, 1.560–562; NEM 3: 489–494; EP 2: 398–433). It turns out that the earlier texts provide fresh insight regarding the evolution of Peirce’s thinking about interpretants and generally support the last view listed above, especially as summarized and supplemented by Bergman (2004: 382–386 and 2009: 123–127). An additional trichotomy that Peirce mentions only once, in a draft letter to Victoria Lady Welby, is worth examining to

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**1** Page numbers given for citations of Peirce’s manuscripts correspond to the microfilm sequence as reproduced in the images made available online by the Digital Peirce Archive (<https://rs.cms.hu-berlin.de/peircearchive>) and the Scalable Peirce Interpretation Network ([https://fromthepage.com/collection/show?collection\\_id=16](https://fromthepage.com/collection/show?collection_id=16)), followed by Peirce’s handwritten page numbers [in square brackets] where different. For R 318, Priscila Borges created a diagram of all five versions ([https://peirce.iupui.edu/resources/ms318\\_diag.pdf](https://peirce.iupui.edu/resources/ms318_diag.pdf)) referencing the page numbers assigned by the Institute for Studies in Pragmaticism, while Houghton Library at Harvard University provides high-resolution color images (<https://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:fhcl.hough:12486126>) in yet another arrangement.

**2** André De Tienne, Director and General Editor of the Peirce Edition Project, has confirmed this order and time frame (e-mail correspondence, 1 September 2020). It is misleading when Lalor (1997) refers to emotional/energetic/logical as “the 1906 trichotomy” and immediate/dynamical/final as “the 1909 trichotomy.”

complete the picture: intentional/effectual/communicational (EP 2: 478, SS 196–197, 1906 Mar 9).<sup>3</sup>

## 2 The emotional interpretant

Peirce's early drafts for "Pragmatism" say that the first interpretant of a sign is "the meaning as expressed in the sign" (R 319: 8), "the meaning as it is expressed in the sign" (R 322: 9[10]), and "the meaning as it is felt in the sign" (R 321: 19[17]). The first two statements are obviously consistent with his subsequent characterization of the immediate interpretant as "the Interpretant represented or signified in the Sign" (CP 8.343, EP 2: 482, 1908 Dec 24). The third perhaps anticipates his final full taxonomy of sign classes, where the fifth of the 10 divisions is according to "the nature of the Immediate (or Felt?) Interpretant" (CP 8.369, EP 2: 489, 1908 Dec 25). Such an "emotional meaning" is never an *actual* feeling, but rather a *quality* of feeling, as he subsequently clarifies:

Some signs have no other meaning than the feelings they convey. By "feelings" I mean all undecomposable qualities of consciousness. Every sign, in order to be a sign to us, must have that sort of meaning. I call it the emotional meaning. (R 321: 20[18])

The emotional meaning ... is involved in the mere presentation of the sign. Only, it is what that presentation brings and not what it finds. It is what is conveyed strictly in the presentation itself without any reflexion, or abstraction, or analysis, or other efficient element. It is not, (to make a very fine point) even the feeling the sign brings, since that is an actual fact, and so belongs to the existential meaning. This is only the quality of feeling. (R 318: 173–174[18–19])

Qualities of feeling may be meanings of signs. Thus, a piece of concerted music, since it mediates between the quality of the composer's succession of musical emotions and another in the breast of the auditor, is a sign. A quality of feeling is neither a thought nor an existential event. (R 318: 104–105[20–21])

These excerpts are remarkably similar to how Peirce would further describe the immediate interpretant two years later:

My Immediate Interpretant is ... the total unanalyzed effect that the Sign is calculated to produce, or naturally might be expected to produce; and I have been accustomed to identify this with the effect the sign first produces or may produce upon a mind, without any reflection upon it...

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<sup>3</sup> Peirce mentions another trichotomy of interpretants only once, likewise in a draft letter to Welby: destinate/effective/explicit (EP 2: 481, SS 84, 1908 Dec 23). The context is a discussion of abstract sign classification rather than concrete semiosis, and it is controversial whether destinate and explicit correspond respectively to final and immediate, or vice-versa.

My Immediate Interpretant is implied in the fact that each Sign must have its peculiar Interpretability before it gets any Interpreter ... The Immediate Interpretant is an abstraction, consisting in a Possibility. (SS 110–111, 1909 Mar 14)

The Immediate Interpretant consists in the Quality of the Impression that a sign is fit to produce, not to any actual reaction. (CP 8.315, EP 2: 500, 1909 Apr 1)

In one draft, he even refers to the emotional meaning as “the immediate meaning” of the sign (R 318: 174[19]). Peirce finally introduces the term “emotional interpretant” in the unfinished second version of R 318:

First, there is the “emotional interpretant,” which consists in a feeling or rather in the quality of a feeling. It is sometimes formed into an image, yet is more usually merely a feeling which causes the interpreter of the sign to believe he recognizes the import and intention of the sign. A concerted piece of music, for example, brings a succession of musical emotions answering to those of the composer. This is an extreme case; usually the emotional interpretant consists merely in a sense, more or less complex, perhaps amounting to an image, perhaps not, of the meaning of the sign. All signs whatsoever must, in order to fulfill their functions as signs, first of all produce such emotional interpretants. (R 318: 160[16])

Hence, all signs have an emotional interpretant, which is the immediate interpretant as manifested in concrete human semiosis.

### 3 The energetic interpretant

Peirce’s early drafts for “Pragmatism” say that the second interpretant of a sign is “the meaning as an actual effect” (R 319: 8); “the meaning, as it is, in fact, produced by the sign” (R 322: 9[10]); and “a meaning as an actual effect” (R 321: 19[17]). These statements are obviously consistent with his subsequent characterization of the dynamical interpretant as the “effect actually produced on the mind by the Sign” (CP 8.343, EP 2: 482, 1908 Dec 24). Such an “existential meaning” is any action or other event that is the direct result of a sign, including any actual feeling that it evokes, as he subsequently clarifies:

The existential meanings of ordinary human signs are limited to voluntary efforts. I specify voluntary actions, because involuntary actions, however analogous they may be to those that are voluntary, are not determined by signs to us. (R 321: 20[18])

Little need be said of the existential meaning, which in its entirety, consists in the sum total of the actual effects which the sign has had and will have, in its capacity as a sign. These must not be confounded with the effects of the truth of the sign. (R 318: 175[20])

The proposition is that signs often have existential meanings, or results of their force as signs, and each meaning consisting in some deed or fact, or single series of historic events, where my adjective merely means that I use the noun “event” in the sense in which an event can happen but once, because the past is gone, and time does not double on itself. (R 318: 103[19])

These excerpts are remarkably similar to how Peirce would further describe the dynamical interpretant two years later:

My Dynamical Interpretant consists in [the] direct effect actually produced by a Sign upon an Interpreter of it...

My Dynamical Interpretant is that which is experienced in each act of Interpretation and is different in each from that of any other .... The Dynamical Interpretant is a single actual event. (SS 110–111, 1909 Mar 14)

The Dynamical Interpretant is whatever interpretation any mind actually makes of a sign .... I am not speaking of the *feelings* of passion or of surprise as *qualities*. For those *qualities* are no part of the Dynamic Interpretant. But the *agitations* of passion and of surprise are the actual Dynamic Interpretants.... Thus every actual interpretation is dyadic.... [T]he meaning of any sign for anybody consists in the way he reacts to the sign. (CP 8.315, EP 2: 499, 1909 Apr 1)

In two drafts, he even refers to the existential meaning as “the dynamical meaning” of the sign: “[T]he dynamical meaning comprises every act that gets performed as an effect of this sign” (R 321: 46[19]). “The dynamical meaning consists of an act or a number of acts actually performed in past, present, or future tense, as a result of the sign of which it is a meaning” (R 321: 43[19]). Peirce finally introduces the term “energetic interpretant” in the unfinished second version of R 318:

Next, many signs bring about actual events. The infantry officer’s word of command “Ground arms!” produces as its existential interpretant, (the sign having been first apprehended in an “emotional interpretant,”) the slamming down of the musket-butts. The less thought intervenes between the apprehension and this act, the better the sign fulfills its function. All signs that are not to evaporate in mere feelings must have such an existential interpretant, or as I might, perhaps, better have called it, such an energetic interpretant. (R 318: 160–161[16–17])

Hence, many signs have an energetic interpretant, which is the dynamical interpretant as manifested in concrete human semiosis.

## 4 The logical interpretant

Peirce’s early drafts for “Pragmatism” say that the third interpretant of a sign is “the meaning as the ultimate normal outcome of reason, the logical conclusion” (R 319: 8); “the meaning, as the ultimate logical result that deliberate reason ought

to draw from the sign” (R 322: 9[10]); and “the meaning as the [proper/logical] ultimate outcome of the sign” (R 321: 19[17]). These statements are obviously consistent with his subsequent characterization of the normal interpretant as the “effect that would be produced on the mind by the Sign after sufficient development of thought” (CP 8.343, EP 2: 482, 1908 Dec 24).<sup>4</sup> Such a “logical meaning” is a general mental habit corresponding to a conditional proposition about the future, as he subsequently clarifies:

The logical meaning is general. It is therefore a habit, in the sense in which a chemical body, or the weather, or anything else that can be said to have a “behavior,” or character of action, may happen to have more or less settled habits. (R 321: 43[19])

This sought-for something must be of a mental nature, because such is the nature of the sign. Moreover, since pragmatism, in my view, relates to intellectual concepts exclusively, and since these are all general, the mental element we seek must be general. The principal general constituents of the mind are desires and habits. Desires, however, are too much feelings to suit the conditions, and are, besides, previous to the facts. Habits, on the contrary, may be entirely unconscious, and are not of the nature of events or things; and they result from repeated acts. They thus fulfill all the conditions. (R 318: 176–177[21–22])

The object is antecedent, the meaning subsequent to the sign. That third meaning, therefore, must be in some sort of future tense.

To this may be added the consideration that it is not all signs that have a logical meaning, but only intellectual concepts, which are all general, or else intimately dependent on a general. This shows that the particular species of future tense to which the logical meaning belongs is the conditional. All grammarians find the conditional to be a modified future. (R 318: 111[27])

These excerpts are remarkably similar to how Peirce would further describe the final interpretant two years later:

My Final Interpretant is... the effect the Sign *would* produce upon any mind upon which circumstances should permit it to work out its full effect...

[T]he Final Interpretant is the one Interpretative result to which every Interpreter is destined to come if the Sign is sufficiently considered... The Final Interpretant is that toward which the actual tends. (SS 110–111, 1909 Mar 14)

The Final Interpretant does not consist in the way in which any mind does act but in the way in which every mind would act. That is, it consists in a truth which might be expressed in a

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**4** The equivalence of the normal and final interpretants is evident from Peirce’s very similar definitions for them as distinguished from the immediate and dynamical interpretants. His experimentation with these and other names presumably reflects his confession that “my own conception of this third interpretant is not yet quite free from mist” (CP 4.536, 1906).

conditional proposition of this type: “If so and so were to happen to any mind, this sign would determine that mind to such and such *conduct*.” By “conduct,” I mean action under an intention of self-control. (CP 8.315, EP 2: 499, 1909 Apr 1)

In several drafts (already quoted above), he even refers to the logical meaning as the ultimate, normal, and proper outcome or result of the sign. Peirce finally introduces the term “logical interpretant” in the unfinished second version of R 318:

If there are three interpretants and only two objects, – the object and the interpretant being the two correlates of every sign, – the reason of this discrepancy can only lie in some difference between the relations of the Object and of the Interpretant, respectively, to the Sign. The object is the antecedent, the interpretant the consequent of the sign. The reason sought must, then, be in this, that the interpretant is, in some sense, in a future tense relatively to the sign, while the object is in a past tense. It is not, however, all signs that have logical interpretants. Neither pieces of music and the like, nor words of command and the like, (unless they be needlessly complicated) have any logical interpretants. What are the signs that have logical interpretants? Every such sign is either itself general, or is related to a general from which it derives its logical meaning. (R 318: 162&188[18–19])

Hence, general signs have a logical interpretant, which is the final interpretant as manifested in concrete human semiosis.

## 5 Interpretants and pragmatism

To recapitulate, all signs have emotional interpretants, many signs have energetic interpretants, and general signs have logical interpretants. Peirce presents these quite concisely in the third version of R 318:

[T]here is something which the sign in its significant function essentially determines in its interpreter. I term it the “interpretant” of the sign. In all cases, it includes feelings; for there must, at least, be a sense of comprehending the meaning of the sign. If it includes more than mere feeling, it must evoke some kind of effort. It may include something besides, which, for the present, may be vaguely called “thought.” I term these three kinds of interpretant the “emotional,” the “energetic,” and the “logical” interpretants. (R 318: 300–301[42–43], EP 2: 409)

Many of his late taxonomies for sign classification divide the immediate, dynamical, and/or final interpretants into feeling, action, and thought. That is why it is plausible to derive from this passage—especially in conjunction with CP 5.475–476, which is from the unfinished fourth version (R 318: 32–35) and too long to quote here—the hypothesis that such trichotomies are what he has in mind as the emotional, energetic, and logical interpretants.

However, again, earlier drafts of R 318 clearly affirm that an emotional meaning is a *quality* of feeling, corresponding to the immediate interpretant; any *actual* effect of a sign is an existential meaning, corresponding to the dynamical interpretant; and a logical meaning is a general *habit*, corresponding to the final interpretant. Nevertheless, Peirce evidently had a subtle but noteworthy change of mind about the last of these:

The important point for us is that every sign, if at least, it actually functions as such, has an emotional meaning, or meaning consisting in a quality of feeling; namely, in the pleasurable quality of being recognized as an old acquaintance or else as one that a person feels he comprehends; and along with this there goes, in the case of an intellectual concept, an apprehension of a logical meaning, apt to be very delicate in its clearness, or discrimination between what has and what has not, the meaning in question, but equally apt to be quite crude in its indistinctness, that is, not accurately recognizing the ingredients that go to make up this meaning. (R 318: 107[23])

The mere “apprehension of a logical meaning” is not itself the emotional meaning, but instead something that accompanies it in the case of an intellectual concept. It is a logical interpretant that corresponds to the *first* grade of clearness as identified by Peirce in “How to Make Our Ideas Clear” nearly three decades earlier: “A clear idea is defined as one which is so apprehended that it will be recognized wherever it is met with, and so that no other will be mistaken for it” (CP 5.389, EP 1: 124, 1878).

Previously in the same draft of R 318, he acknowledges that a logical meaning frequently is another sign: “The meaning, or as we had better say, a meaning, is often a sign. A definition is the meaning of its definitum, or sign defined” (R 318: 101 [17]). The verbal definition of a sign is a logical interpretant that corresponds to the *second* grade of clearness: “A distinct idea is defined as one which contains nothing which is not clear. This is technical language; by the *contents* of an idea logicians understand whatever is contained in its definition. So that an idea is *distinctly* apprehended, according to them, when we can give a precise definition of it, in abstract terms” (CP 5.390, EP 1: 124–125, 1878).

Peirce spells out the crucial principle of his pragmatism in the third and fourth versions of R 318:

I do not deny that a concept, proposition, or argument may be a logical interpretant. I only insist that it cannot be the final logical interpretant, for the reason that it is itself a sign of that very kind that has itself a logical interpretant. The habit alone, which though it may be a sign in some other way, is not a sign in that way in which that sign of which it is the logical interpretant is the sign... The concept which is a logical interpretant is only imperfectly so. It somewhat partakes of the nature of a verbal definition, and is as inferior to the habit, and much in the same way, as a verbal definition is inferior to the real definition. The deliberately formed, self-analyzing habit, – self-analyzing because formed by the aid of analysis of the



exercises that nourished it, – is the living definition, the veritable and final logical interpretant. (R 318: 334–335[75–76], CP 5.491)

Shall we say that the effect may be a thought, that is a mental sign? No doubt, it may be so; but if this sign be of an intellectual kind, it must itself have a logical interpretant; and therefore the *ultimate* logical interpretant cannot be of the nature of a sign (that is, not in the same sense.) It can be shown that the only mental effect of a general nature that can be so produced is a *habit*. (R 318: 224[34])

A general mental habit is the final or ultimate logical interpretant of an intellectual concept, its “real definition” and “living definition,” which corresponds to the *third* grade of clearness.<sup>5</sup> In the very first draft of R 318, Peirce revises his famous maxim of pragmatism accordingly (Schmidt 2020): “Consider what effects that might conceivably have practical bearings you conceive the object of your conception to have: then the general mental habit that consists in the production of these effects is the whole meaning of your concept” (R 318: 177[22]). He puts it another way in the next draft: “The immediate effects can only be efforts. The general conception of them is the concept of the habit that governs them” (R 318: 117[33]).

## 6 Interpretants and communication

Bergman (2004: 383–386, 2009: 124–127) goes a step farther, addressing a third trichotomy that Peirce identifies:

There is the *Intentional Interpretant*, which is a determination of the mind of the utterer; the *Effectual Interpretant*, which is a determination of the mind of the interpreter; and the *Communicational Interpretant*, or say the *Cominterpretant*, which is a determination of that mind into which the minds of utterer and interpreter have to be fused in order that any communication should take place. (EP 2: 478, SS 196–197, 1906 Mar 9)

Here the effectual interpretant is plainly equivalent to the dynamical interpretant as an actual effect of the sign on its interpreter. There seems to be a general presumption among scholars that the intentional and communicational interpretants correspond to the immediate and final interpretants, respectively; for example: “In the Logic Notebook (MS 339: 531, 533, 541–44), the Intentional

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<sup>5</sup> This further analysis of the logical interpretant in accordance with Peirce's three grades of clearness contrasts with his own brief remarks about first logical interpretants, lower and higher second logical interpretants, and three varieties of third logical interpretants at the very end of the unfinished fourth version of R 318. He apparently abandoned the idea soon after conceiving it and instead started over with the fifth version.

Interpretant is also called the Intended, Impressional, or Initial Interpretant; the Effectual Interpretant is also called the Factual, Middle, or Dynamic Interpretant; and the Communicational Interpretant is also called the Normal, Habitual, or Eventual Interpretant” (EP 2: 555n2). However, Peirce does not actually mention the intentional, effectual, or communicational interpretants on any of the cited manuscript pages (R 339: 412[275r], 414[276r], 422–425[283r–286r], 1906).

Fortunately, he makes some relevant remarks right after briefly defining the normal, dynamic, and immediate interpretants: “I have thus omitted the *intended* interpretant. So far as the intention is betrayed in the Sign, it belongs to the immediate Interpretant. So far as it is not so betrayed, it may be the Interpretant of *another* sign, but it is in no sense the interpretant of *that* sign” (R 339: 414[276r], 1906 Apr 2). Peirce evidently realized that as “a determination of the mind of the utterer,” what he had called the intentional interpretant three weeks earlier obviously cannot be any of the interpretants of the sign that the utterer is *currently* uttering. Instead, it must be a dynamical interpretant of a *previous* sign determined by the same object.

In fact, Peirce explains at length in the third version of R 318 that the object is “the essential ingredient of the utterer,” while the interpretant is that of the interpreter, and “the essential difference... is that the former antecedes, while the latter succeeds the sign” (R 318: 275–304[17–46], EP 2: 403–410). Consequently, the sign itself serves as “a medium of communication” between the object and interpretant that are *external* to it (EP 2: 390–391, 1906), namely, from the dynamical object to the dynamical interpretant: “In its relation to the Object, the Sign is *passive*; that is to say, its correspondence to the Object is brought about by an effect upon the Sign, the Object remaining unaffected. On the other hand, in its relation to the Interpretant the Sign is *active*, determining the Interpretant without being itself thereby affected” (EP 2: 544n22, 1906).

As for the communicational interpretant, Peirce elaborates on the mind of which it is a determination: “This mind may be called the *commens*. It consists of all that is, and must be, well understood between utterer and interpreter, at the outset, in order that the sign in question should fulfill its function” (EP 2: 478, SS 197, 1906 Mar 9). What is its essential ingredient? “It seems best to regard a sign as a determination of a quasi-mind” (EP 2: 391, 1906). “Moreover, signs require at least two Quasi-minds; a *Quasi-utterer* and a *Quasi-interpreter*; and although these two are at one (i.e., are one mind) in the sign itself, they must nevertheless be distinct. In the Sign they are, so to say, *welded*” (CP 4.551, 1906). Therefore, the communicational interpretant must be *internal* to the sign, namely, the immediate interpretant.

Additional support for this conclusion comes from Peirce’s proposed names for the three classes of signs as divided according to the immediate interpretant’s

mode of presentation: hypothetic, categorical, and relative (R 339: 424[285r], 1906 Aug 31; EP 2: 489, 1908 Dec 25). It is surely not a coincidence that these are also names for three kinds of propositions, which can be distinguished by the number of lines of identity required to denote their subjects in the Beta part of his system of Existential Graphs (R 481: 10, 1896): zero for abstract qualities, one for concrete inferences as monadic relations, and two or more for real dyadic and higher relations. Peirce calls the sheet on which such graphs are scribed “the Quasi-mind in which the Graphist [utterer] and Interpreter are at one,” which represents “all that is tacitly taken for granted between the Graphist and Interpreter, from the outset of their discussion” (CP 4.553, 1906). Therefore, it corresponds directly to the commens as similarly defined by Peirce, so again the communicational interpretant is the immediate interpretant.

The question naturally arises: Where is the final interpretant? It is absent here because the phenomenon of interest is a *discrete* event prescinded from the *continuous* process of semiosis. The final interpretant is the *telos* or ideal aim of the latter, “that which *would* finally be decided to be the true interpretation if consideration of the matter were carried so far that an ultimate opinion were reached” (CP 8.184, EP 2: 496, 1909 Feb 26), so it is not necessarily an outcome that ever *actually* comes about.

## 7 Conclusion

Peirce's different interpretant trichotomies reflect not only the evolution of his thinking about signs and semiosis over time, but also his adoption of different points of view. Bergman helpfully observes how the three discussed herein are complementary rather than redundant or conflicting, thereby contributing to a richer overall understanding:

The suggestion put forth, then, is that the various trichotomies of interpretant can be understood as results of the varying perspectives of inquiry involved. The immediate-dynamical-final division is the broadest substantial notion of the interpretant; it applies primarily to a structural and normative level of semiosis. Thus, it is eminently applicable to social sign uses, operating in a field of signification distinct from individual interpretations .... In contrast, the emotional-energetic-logical division concerns the effect of signs on a human being, as we have already noted. It is how the interpretant is analysed on the individual level of sign use. Finally, the intentional-effectual-communicational trichotomy may be viewed as the application of the triadic conception of the interpretant to the communicative field of signification. (Bergman 2004: 385)

Lalor (1997: 35) calls attention to how Peirce himself describes his approach in the 1907 drafts for “Pragmatism”:

Although the definition [of a sign] does not require the logical interpretant (or, for that matter, either of the other two interpretants) to be a modification of consciousness, yet our lack of experience of any semiosis in which this is not the case, leaves us no alternative to beginning our inquiry into its general nature with a provisional assumption that the interpretant is, at least, in all cases, a sufficiently close analogue of a modification of consciousness to keep our conclusion pretty near to the general truth. We can only hope that, once that conclusion is reached, it may be susceptible of such a generalization as will eliminate any possible error due to the falsity of that assumption. (R 318: 308–309[50–51], CP 5.485, EP 2: 411)

The emotional, energetic, and logical interpretants are the familiar effects of signs that humans routinely experience as “modifications of consciousness.” The immediate, dynamical, and final interpretants are the corresponding effects of signs in general.

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