

Comment on Vincent Colapietro's Article: *The Tones, Tints, and Textures of Temporality: Putting Peirce's Categories to Work*

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It is always a pleasure to take part in this Seminar, for which I thank and congratulate Lucia and her organizing team. It is also a great opportunity to be with great scholars of Peirce and, particularly, to meet again my friends André de Tienne, who came to our 12th International Meeting on Pragmatism in 2009, and Vincent Colapietro, keynote speaker of last year's meeting.

When André heard that I was, again, to comment on a Vincent's text – incidentally the fourth time in these seminars – with his omnipresent sense of humor, he told me: *I think you'll end up specializing in his philosophy!* What I can say is that it has been a privilege to comment his texts and, certainly, the proficuous nature of his writings and intellectual creativity would hamper any specialization that could imply some form of interpretative routine.

The text under review, in addition to a highly suggestive title, begins with rich and highly interesting epigraphs on the theme of this Seminar: time. Allow me then, also, to modestly present a starting epigraph:

One day, a friend of Groucho Marx, an inveterate cigar smoker, told him:
- Did you know that smoking is a *slow* suicide? To which he, *quickly*, replied:
- So, who's in a *hurry*?

I took the liberty of starting with an epigraph that, albeit not as serious as Vincent's, at least being, in only three sentences, four temporal terms, namely: *one day*, *slow*, *quickly* and *hurry*. Indeed, time permeates our everyday life and, consequently, our human language in such a way that it seems genuine to say that Phenomenology, at least that proposed by Peirce, becomes the science that is the cradle of the concept of time. If it is, as Peirce wished, a science descriptive of our experience, then, in this inventory *time* appears as a well-nigh *ubiquitous* participant of the facts that permeate our existence.

Colapietro's text shows explicitly the complexity of dealing with the concept of time, effectively difficult to express. This difficulty dates from antiquity, in the words of St. Augustine of Hippo: *What then is time? If no one asks me, I know: if I wish to explain it to*

one that asketh, I know not. Add to the difficulties of the concept of time the other always complex task of collating from Peirce's works the passages where this concept is mentioned. It is worth quoting here an initial passage of Colapietro's text:

The task of reconstructing Peirce's account of time is an extremely difficult one, not least of all because of the inherent difficulty of this topic but also because of his widely scattered discussions of time. There is no one text to which we can go to gather his views regarding this topic; there are not even a small number of extended treatments of this multifaceted phenomenon. As a result, one has to gather for oneself these views from a large number of disparate writings. Quite apart from interpreting some of Peirce's most challenging texts (and his discussion of time unquestionably fall into this category), the task of simply identifying and collating the most important texts on time is Herculean.
(p. 2).

Fully in accord with Colapietro on this Herculean nature of collating Peirce's texts about time, I would say, without fear of over generalizing, that this applies to almost every topic in his writings. To my mind, the reason lies not only in the intrinsic difficulty of some themes – and here, *time* is perhaps an extreme example – but also in a characteristic of the very philosophy bequeathed by Peirce. The North American author's extensive writings, despite predominantly comprising unpublished manuscripts, represents in its mature state a *system* of ideas that intertwine logically. Each one is suggestive of others, and solicits heuristically the addition of others – Peirce sought incessantly to formulate this interlacing of theories throughout his intellectual trajectory.

A thematically rich system always raises many issues – perhaps it would be fairer to say – *embraces* many issues – contrary to narrow philosophies that, unable of doing it in view of its theoretical feebleness, often mask their forced omission disqualifying them for their non-philosophical nature.

An analysis of Peircean works requires a heuristic and dialoguing attitude towards the author. In his lifetime, Peirce never published a *single* book. So, to delve into his text, primarily handwritten and without the author's review that an effective publication would have necessarily required, for the sole purpose of analyzing concepts and their logical-deductive consistency, such as some scholars do, is, to say the least, an innocuous approach,

not to say unfair. I broach this point to counter a prevailing practice among some Peirce scholars who, by reducing philosophy to a mere analysis of language and making use of some supposedly precision-forging formalism, boast of finding contradictions that would fracture the Peircean writings into disconnected parts, thereby seeking to invalidate the notion that he had formulated a *system* of philosophy. In view of the nature of the originals that he bequeathed us, such an attitude can be compared to the inconceivable expectation that babies should be born elegantly dressed, mastering some language, and without any trace whatsoever of uterine fluids that could *asymmetrically* adhere to their bodies.

It is well-known fact that even classical works, twice edited and reviewed by their respective authors, such as Kant's first critique, are not exempt from possible contradictions, which is why to seek logical faults that possibly strip the systemic character of Peirce's work through potential contradictions, frequently arising from a bad interpretation of the original text, seems totally preposterous considering, as mentioned before, the nature of the writings bequeathed by Peirce. Indeed, a reading of Peirce's work published so far reveals thought *in progress*, as commonly said in academic circles – often, I believe, a thought that frequently thinks itself writing, meditative in its essence, in a permanent heuristic formation. Thus he must be read, *building* concepts with him, *thinking* with him, in an attitude of spirit generously welcoming of one of the most creative thoughts in the history of philosophy.

I am happy in having found a similar point of view in Colapietro's article, which I now quote: *It is important to think with Peirce, to take up his topics, armed with his categories, and to strive to think through these in a manner recognizably Peircean.* (p. 8).

Colapietro mentions *being armed with the categories*. While this recommendation is essential, I hold that the understanding of the key theories that interact in Peirce's thought, taken as a *system* that provides an interpretative basis to the various philosophical themes, is a weapon as necessary as the author's categorial triad. Concerning time in particular, I think that it is necessary to adopt more emphatically the borderline between Peirce and the great majority of authors of a caliber that can be included in a history of philosophy – the author's *realism* of an scholastic origin. This realism will not only acknowledge the alterity of objective time, but also will consider it in light of the ontological synechism, namely, time is a *continuum*, notwithstanding its imperfection as all real continuum under an ongoing evolutionary process.

In many passages, Colapietro's paper emphasizes the objectivity of time, citing a roster of authors who either deny the reality of time, or consider it only in its subjective

dimension. Notable among them is Einstein, who ventured into philosophical concepts, whose overly suspect quality was not only his privilege, but a common predicate among some of his contemporaries who, likewise, ventured to write philosophy. On one occasion, visiting Brazil, walking in the Rio de Janeiro Botanical Gardens with Tristão de Athayde, the latter drew a notebook and started writing. Einstein then asked him what he was doing. Tristão replied: *I had an idea and jotted it down so as not to forget. Don't you do the same with yours?* Einstein then replied, modestly: *I don't need to. So far, I had only one.* Had he remained faithful to this answer, he might perhaps have kept silent about philosophical matters.

It is curious to think *how* defenders of the subjectivity of time deal with the knowledge we now have that the universe has 15 billion years, and *Homo Sapiens-Sapiens* only 100,000. No only in time are we, relatively, a fraction of an instant, as far as space is concerned, we are no more than a speck among 100 billion stars of the Milky Way, which, in turn, is part of a universe comprising 100 billion galaxies. Should such an extreme notion of scale not inhibit the supposition that we are the center of temporality and of the constitution of the meaning of the universe? It's funny how the ignorance of this scale still makes us promote a conceptually Ptolemaic contest: that of *Miss Universe*.

The notion of alterity is really basic in philosophy, as a general concept that can not be solely confined to intersubjective relations, as generally occurs in psychoanalytic circles: the *other* comprises all that we are not, independent of us and, therefore, are part of the theater of reactions of secondness.

Peirce's cosmology is the chapter of his progeny that shows that the emergence of time is concomitant with the emergence of the third category, that is, with the rise of the relations of order among particulars that, initially, were subjected to absolute Chance. It is very interesting to recall Peirce's explanation of this tendency to form general relations, constituting laws of Nature: a tendency toward the acquisition of habits, configuring what Peirce called the great Law of Mind. Now, this point of the Peircean work is tantamount to saying that the acquisition of habits is not a privilege of the human mind, but of all that, with it, shares a similar nature – that is the greatest key to Peirce's objective idealism, which, without a vision of his theoretical system, seems a gratuitous isolated doctrine, unnecessary for an understanding of the author, and that only appeared to exasperate those allergic to metaphysics. With the emergence of the *continua* of habits, time also emerges. In one passage

of a letter to Christine Ladd-Franklin, dating from 1891, Peirce is explicit in saying: *There was no real time so far as there was no regularity...*¹.

Indeed, even Kant, who only admitted time in its subjective dimension, turning it into a *a priori* form of sense of our interiority, also mentioned by Colapietro, said that the absolutely unconditioned, or the absolutely free, therefore, the absolutely irregular, could not be cognoscible. No concept can be founded on what does not have any respect whatsoever for some relation or order, and thus the absolutely irregular contains no relations of time. Time is, therefore, a condition of intelligibility concomitant with the general relations between phenomena. Advocates of subjective and objective time would hardly dispute this point.

However, the study of Peirce's Cosmology in particular would, I presume, as such was my own personal experience, make one think the concepts of objective and subjective time in a clear and distinct manner. Even the ancient Greeks knew how to separate them: *Aion*, *Kairós* and *Kronos*. While *Aion* e *Kairós* satisfied dimensions of a subjectivity dominated by the mythological imaginary, *Kronos* always reigned as objective time – the inexorable factual and regular passing from the past to the future.

I may have indulged too much on my own viewpoints, to the detriment of direct comments on Colapietro's excellent paper. However, allow me to say that his article offered me a pleasant reading, proving, once again, the intellectual stature of the author and certifying the purely heuristic motivation with which he wrote it. If I dared to venture into comments parallel with the text, forgive me my friend Vincent, for blaming you for it. I only precociously accepted the invitation you made on page 8 of your article:

I would like to issue a call to establish a research project devoted to this important topic. Nothing less than a team of researchers is adequate to the task; and so I would like to institute such a team or, at least, issue a call for this. Please join me in this endeavor.

I should be parsimonious with the time of this Seminar, out of respect to its own theme. But, allow me to mention further that the text raises interesting insights on the relationship of time with art, particularly with music, and this is one of the sub-themes that I would like to explore more deeply on a future occasion. So, I leave here a point on which I would like to hear more from Colapietro. The text emphatically states that music would be temporal art *par excellence* (p. 23) – which, incidentally, is Schopenhauer's position, the

¹CP-8.318; in this letter Peirce attempts to sum up his Cosmology.

philosopher who best wrote about music. To what type of temporality, then, would it relate? Reading a musical score takes time, hearing a symphony also – these are chronological times that would not distinguish music from literature, or theater, for example. Then, would the temporality of music be solely of a subjective nature? Would it be, perhaps, a mixture of subjectivity and objectivity as regards time?

Finally, this possibility of a play between objective and subjective time in art reminds me of Shakespeare, in the final verses of his Sonnet XV, referring to his beloved :

*And all in war with Time for love of you,
As he takes from you, I engraft you new.²*

Thank you!

²Sonnet XV, in *Complete Sonnets and Poems: The Oxford Shakespeare The Complete Sonnets and Poems*. Oxford University Press, 2008. Translated by Ivo Barroso (Shakespeare - COMÉDIAS E SONETOS. Editora Abril, 1981.)

In the Portuguese translation by Ivo Barroso (Shakespeare - *Comédias e Sonetos*. Editora Abril, 1981), these verses become:

*E crua guerra contra o Tempo enfrento.
Pois tudo que te toma eu te acrescento*