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The semiotic impulse: experimenting with Peirce’s diagrammatic love
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Love and the cosmos
“Philosophy, when just escaping from its golden pupa-skin, mythology, proclaimed the great evolutionary agency of the universe to be Love” (CP 1983 6.287).1 Written in 1893, Charles S. Peirce’s statement about love might come across as a little unfit for our time, though not necessarily because its cosmological character would sound too pre-Kantian to the contemporary ear. Already in Kant’s time, the capacity of the cosmos to interrupt the transcendental subject had forced his contemporaries and successors to find ways of inheriting from pre-critical metaphysics without replicating its dogmatism.2 In any case, the Kantian conceptual plane has long been intersected by others which have not taken the limits of reason as a prohibition to metaphysics and Peirce’s is no exception.3 It is thus not the cosmological scope that is necessarily an issue here. The more pressing problem would rather seem to be that there is very little in such a concept of love to suggest that it is political enough, that it is nuanced enough to respond to the increasing codification of love by technologies of power. Peirce’s vision seems to be too indifferent, too general and too blind to the power structures sustaining a concept of love that many critics have found to be too enmeshed in oppressive modes of subjectivation. From love’s function as an idealised discourse ensuring the distribution of biopolitical control and the preservation of hetero-patriarchal relations (Foucault 1984; Garofalo 2012) to its role in the formation of group identity (Freud 1922; Salecl 1998), the domination of bodies that are racially and sexually othered (McClintock 1995; Ahmed 2003) and the propagation of aggressive libidinal economies (Fortunati 1995; Hochschild 2003), one repeatedly encounters the problem of love as construct—a construct that has little to do with the liberating potential the notion usually promises. To phrase the problem in the way that Peirce would, insofar as such implications are ignored, the pragmatist himself would remain open to the accusation of not being pragmatic enough, of not minding “the effects of his conceptions” (CP 1878 5.1–5.2).4

From this angle, Peirce’s name could be seen as just another one in a litany of philosophers who could be subjected to the same type of criticism insofar as they have made love an abstract concept rather maladapted to account for complicated narratives and practices of love. Sooner or later one would be confronted with a problem of sufficient reason. Why turn to Peirce? What does a cosmic vision of love have to offer to the contemporary subject still negotiating the long-lasting and frequently detrimental effects of a transcendental ideal?

One way of addressing this methodological problem could be to place Peirce within a continuum of thinkers whose thought has historically trickled down to the contemporary problematic about love. Yet this is exactly the path I wish to avoid taking, not only...
because such a historical approach would naturally be beyond the scope of an article. However instructive it might be, I wish to avoid what this approach usually implies, namely proving a thinker’s usefulness for a time they did not live in and assuming a certain continuity of problems they might not even recognise as their own. Neither is my intention to defend Peirce's misunderstood genius and offer the “true” interpretation of love. The aspirational ascent of an interpretation towards Truth is something that Peirce the evolutionist would probably laugh with. Turning to his concept of cosmic love is thus not an attempt to deny the implication of love into technologies of power, negate the value of criticisms levelled against it or propose a “better” definition. If I turn to Peirce it is because of what his philosophy allows one to do, which is to raise the problem in the way a semiotician might: even if one accepts it is a construct, is cosmic love a sign worth saving?

Peirce might have laughed again, this time with the question itself. Unless one is careful, one might suppose that the proposed task of saving—naïve in its generality and conjuring a rift between reality and construction—would involve deconstructing the social and historical conventions underlying the sign “love”. For his part, Peirce would definitely not disagree with conventionality being one of the fundamental components of any sign. It is questionable, however, whether he would treat convention as arbitrary fiction that would moreover be destroyed once brought to the light of conscious critique. Such an approach is built upon a floating-signifier scenario that he would find wanting in complexity to say the least. Not that signs do not fall in and out of use, of course; yet there is no reason to suppose that the construction and use of signs—what Peirce will call semiosis—is completely arbitrary or over-determined by consciousness. In other words, there is no reason to suppose that construction is strictly “social”, if by the adjective we are to understand the activity of humans. The sign, any sign, may be a construct but its life, evolution, endurance and potential extinction is a complicated affair that the rational production and destruction of signs can only ever do poor justice to. For Peirce, beyond and before the activity of conscious subjects, there is semiosis as nature, testifying to a vast process of non-human cosmic construction, which is precisely what he terms “evolutionary love”.

Insofar as we begin with such an understanding of construction, it needs to be said that the question we have posed goes beyond the problem of the adequacy of a name and its critical demystification. One could certainly substitute “cosmic love” with “relation” or another term so as to bestow some sense of neutrality or objectivity to a sign that has otherwise been as “illusory” as it has been elusive, as testified by its multiplication into romantic love, platonic love, caritas, fraternitas, eros, etc. Yet such a gesture would still need to presuppose and refer to what is constructed by the sign as “real” despite dispelling it as a fiction. The question I am proposing is thus less of an exercise in deconstruction than a call for speculative experimentation. In turn, this call to speculation need not be taken as a throwback to the type of reflection that would recover a cosmos as another ideal, pure enough and general enough to subsume and neutralise conflicting constructs. Rather, it is part of what Peirce would call a pragmatic mode of thinking, a “flight of imagination” that evaluates the signs or fictions it refers to in terms of their effects, while constructing novel signs to respond to specific experiences of the world (CP 1903 5.196). To the extent that it keeps sight of the Peircean premise, this article thus aspires to join that stream of pragmatist thought which, although it follows different trajectories—Dewey’s, James’, Whitehead’s—nonetheless attempts to resist the “insurmountable alternative” between the “merely constructed” and the “factual” as Isabelle Stengers and Bruno Latour would put it (Stengers [2002] 2011, 9; Latour, 2004a, 2014).

Following the pragmatic speculative route, our question may thus be refined: asking whether cosmic love is a sign worth saving is inextricable from what the sign constructs, what the sign mobilises and what requires it with regard to a specific problem. As I will argue, Peirce’s evolutionary love mobilised a vocal and plural cosmos, capable of expressing its own agency in its signs; what required it was the onslaught of logical positivism that treated these signs as subjective fictions; finally, what it responded to was the pragmatic problem of resisting the dilemma between construction and reality in the interpretation of natural phenomena. Against this tendency, Peirce’s concept of cosmic love will affirm the experience of the world as a process of sign-construction. Moreover, to address a problem that Peirce will see as both ontological and methodological, it will also become evolutionary or “diagrammatic”, a characterisation that I am borrowing from his writings on Existential Graphs. Through love as evolutionary diagram Peirce will thus experiment with the logical possibility of a cosmic creativity that does not a priori structure its signs but immanently expresses itself in its creations.

It is the particular nature of love as diagram rather than structure that this article builds on to respond to a different but related dilemma. This has to do with the problem I started with, namely that in order to make love bear on the political one would have to either strip it of its cosmic character or else make it lose its relevance for human concerns. In what follows, I will be arguing for the possibility of Peirce’s diagrammatic love being understood as an
experimental ethics of sign formation, which in turn may be said to converse with a politics that is fit for semiotic pluralism—a “cosmopolitics” as Isabelle Stengers puts it, that honours divergent worlds and explores the possibility of creating a common world past visions of an already unified cosmos (Stengers 2005, 995).

**Love in the junction**

What can be said about a philosophy that terms itself “agapism” but never provides a definition of love? Throughout Peirce’s writings, love is as ubiquitous as it is elusive. As he asserts on several occasions, love is “creative”; it is “the great evolutionary agency of the universe”; it “cannot have a contrary” (CP 1893 6.302; 1878 6.287; 1893 6.304). Or, as is put forth in his very early writings in 1857, love organises and relates the affections of the soul, opening the latter up onto a world of permanence, a world of causality and a world of community simultaneously (W1 1857, 4). It is also “Sympathy”, akin to the category of the Third: “Continuity, process, flow of time”; “Comparison, Exchange. Modification, compromise […] Sign, representative. Combination, mixture. Half-breed. Pin. Coherence. Whole” (W5 1886, 295). Throughout Peirce’s opus, there are plenty or references to love yet these references always seem to inflate rather than refine its conceptualisation. One could claim that the definition of love never really becomes adequate to its experience. A constant motif in his work is the reluctance to submit love to a conceptual structure that would abstract from and saturate all its worldly instances and require that the latter be measured against it or agree with it.

Of course, the above does not mean that a definition of love is impossible or that abstraction is to be done away with. It simply means that defining is not to be made into an exercise in transcendence. To use Peirce’s own language, the structure a definition creates may well be “prescinded” from the instances it attempts to generalise. Yet “precision” may not be confused with “abstraction” as the power to explain away “fictions”. Peirce is adamant in this regard: “[the] real world cannot be distinguished from a fictitious world by any description” (CP 1903 2. 337). Definitions are always tied to what announces itself as significant. Accordingly, conceptual structures are not to be evaluated in terms of laying claim to Truth; rather, their effects are to be weighed in terms of how well they respond to a problem precisely because they are mutually constructed with it. This is at once the ground and the consequence of pragmatism as the practice of leaving the path of inquiry “open” (CP 1905 5.481). If love must be defined then this is to be done experimentally, in terms of the *pragmata* it creates, and speculatively, in terms of what it enables the philosopher to do.

Throughout his work Peirce is characteristically less interested in what love is than in what love does. Even before pragmatism acquires a name, he is very much the conceptual experimenter. Indeed, in his thought love finds itself in a system before it finds itself in a definition. Alternatively qualified as “concretion”, “mediation”, or “realisation” (W1 1864, 145), love emerges as the logical *and* metaphysical movement that constructs signs in more or less enduring wholes. From very early on, the indeterminacy of the term thus exemplifies the fact that love is a movement that co-evolves with its determinations. To the extent that it is such a movement, its operation is less of the order of structure and more of the order of evolutionary process, or to put it in different terms, of the diagram.

Understanding the indefinability of love as diagram and what it entails requires that we connect it to the particular experiment it is a part of. In general, Peirce is not a philosopher who does us favours when it comes to following the exposition of his thought. His writings—only recently published in chronological order—are very difficult to navigate in this respect. Yet one of the problems he consistently responds to throughout his work is the need for resisting the structural closure of philosophical thought in terms of a misplaced trust in rationalism. This need will be connected to nineteenth-century developments in the sciences and mathematics. Already in Peirce’s time, developments in chemistry, physics, and biology were increasingly testifying to a natural world that did not exactly accommodate the mechanistic worldview. On the other, alternative geometries were beginning to expose the limitations of formal logical systems and demonstrative reasoning upon which philosophical thought had hitherto relied. For Peirce, who had begun his academic life as a chemist and mathematician, such changes will be taken to signal the necessity for “laboratory-philosophy”; a mode of thinking that would allow for a rich, a properly significant, experience of the world as vocal and self-expressive (CP 1905 1.129).

Yet at the same time that this voice was beginning to be heard, it was also in the process of being silenced by positivism. Compounding an ill-drawn opposition between subject and nature already operative since the advent of Kantian epistemology, positivists invoked natural “facts” but only to the extent that these were subject to pure phenomenalism and logical verification (CP 1867 2.511). For Peirce, such a gestured failed the test of transforming the philosophical method. The problem, of course, was not in speaking of facts as phenomena or constructs. The point was that these phenomena were spoken of
merely in relation to human experience and observation that had become synonymous to sense-perception and apodictic reasoning, respectively (CP 1893 6.289). In attempting to talk about phenomena, positivism had not taken construction far enough; it had fallen back to a tacit determinism and had locked construction within the dilemma between fiction and reality. From this perspective, whether or not this phenomenal reality was deemed to be governed by mechanistic laws or absolute chance mattered very little; both doctrines were the two sides of the same coin, the same positivist caricaturisation of epistemology extended to experimental science.\textsuperscript{11}

In this context, Peirce’s concept of cosmic love or “agape” emerges in resistance to the rupture between the real and the fictitious. For its part, the Peircian sign is the expression of this love, which will come to designate precisely what is worth saving: most importantly, the capacity of nature to fashion its own significance in its very phenomena; but besides that, the capacity of thought to operate beyond the strictures of a phenomenological reduction that forces the thinker to posit an experience abstracted from the very thing experienced.\textsuperscript{12} Peirce will affirm the value of scientific reason but he will refuse to reduce it to the free variation of consciousness surveying the field of experience in search of universals. Resisting the submission of scientific hypothesis to either deduction or induction, he will reclaim it as abductive, with abduction being defined as that mode of thought that constructs and invents in response to the pluravocality of the world.\textsuperscript{13} In the “laboratory”, there is nothing to be explained away as merely phenomenon and nothing to be lamented as fiction.\textsuperscript{14} It is not the phenomena but the questions themselves, the ways we think about phenomena, that the experimenter is always “impatient to get a whack at” (CP 1893 4.69).

It is perhaps the apparent inconsistency of Peirce the famed logician turning to the concept of evolutionary “love” that will prompt his successors to shelve it off pragmatism. And yet, as I have argued above, the cosmic vision of love is hardly a sign of naïveté.\textsuperscript{15} On the contrary, it becomes a triply articulated intervention to a problem that Peirce seems to be at once metaphysical, logical, and methodological. To the extent that it challenges the separatist logic between the subject and the world, love brings into play a new concept of continuity. Expressed topologically and metaphysically, it becomes the ideal limit where thought and thing meet and are mutually differentiated. As such, this continuity will be a call for philosophical thought to inhabit the junction which can only be experienced or felt and where this construction is taking place. Of course, this call will not demand that philosophical method relinquish rational reflection but only that the latter be radically transformed. The junction itself will demand that the thinker be abducted by a logical activity that does not adhere to binaries and is not “about facts” but is the experiential fact-giving process itself. Beyond the impoverishment of experience as sense-perception, the pragmatic method will invoke a generative experience as a site of construction and will find its true character as “the agapastic development of thought”: it will become the type of speculative or “abductive” experimentation that tends to the growth of fictions, putting them into situations where their effects are tested in terms of what they construct in relation to a problem (CP 1893 6.315).

The concept of the diagram is admittedly not one that Peirce explicitly associates with love. Yet as does love in his philosophy, so the diagram exists primarily in function and motion, as a grower and tester of fictions before it crystallises in a definition. Peirce’s most extensive experimentation with diagrams is to be found in his writings on Existential Graphs, which fully materialise in his late thought (1895–1910), where he attempts to formalise the movement of thought. There the diagram will be presented as a representational tool, an image or “icon” that simultaneously “synthesises and shows” hitherto unnoticed relations between signs (CP 1885 1.339; 1.384). It is in this paradoxical simultaneity of making and revealing where the constructive character of the diagram is found. As an iconic representation, it may be certainly understood as an analogy, a sketch (mental or otherwise) that “exhibits a similarity” to what it grammatises (CP 1885 1.369). Yet this similarity is not be confused with the a priori synthetic codification of the real proposed by critical philosophy and worsened by positivism. The curiosity of the diagram is that it is the symptom of the Peircian reversal of the Kantian synthetic operation: it is the real that now “compels”; it is the real that demands the imaginary “hypostatisation of relations”—the lines, the dots, their connections—which, again, the mind may render “precise” but never “abstract” (CP 1.384). The diagram in Peirce comes neither with the certainties of rational intellect nor does it derive from it; insofar as it reveals unexpected complications, it “gives facts” thus forcing the intellect to experience itself as continuous with a vocal world from which it draws its very synthetic power.

It would be possible to begin with the methodological value of the diagram as presented in the writings on the Existential Graphs and focus on what they propose—the combination of the propositional calculus, first-order logic and modal calculi in an iconic fashion that challenges the reliance of logical notation on language and deductive reasoning and marshals imagination as a superior mode of experimental thought.\textsuperscript{16} It would also be possible to begin by tracing the genesis of the diagram to the reversal I have mentioned above, which has to do with Peirce’s
remodelling of the Kantian problem of synthesis, the role of the imagination and the relation of the faculties, which the diagram will submit to a relation of “play” rather than hierarchy (CP 1908 6.461).\textsuperscript{17} Indeed, Peirce’s thought is systematic enough to permit any such route into the diagram and its relation with love. However, since I have framed my question as one of significance, of whether cosmic love is a sign worth saving, it seems fitting to follow the semiotic route.

In any case, the Peircean sign is where the methodological and metaphysical movement of diagrammatic love find both their expression and their ground. For one thing, the diagram derives its iconic character from one of the types of sign; for another, love finds in the sign its corroboration as a creative semiotic impulse. At first look, the definition of the sign seems fairly simple: a sign, as Peirce puts it, “is something that stands to somebody for something” (CP 1897 2.228). Yet for all its simplicity, the mediating relation between two components is neither static nor a matter of mere agreement between representation and thing secured through an a priori transcendental structure as demanded by the Kantian system. The type of relation that belongs to a pair, designating one member as subject and another as object is not enough to capture the mediating movement of semiosis.\textsuperscript{18} First of all, the activity of mediation itself needs to be taken into account alongside the pair. The creation of meaning through mediation therefore implies that the sign is always a triad or “third”, a multiplicity of at least three coordinates: its own essence or quality, its object or reaction, and its reference to an interpretant or subject (W2 1868, 223).\textsuperscript{19} Furthermore, the components of the triad are interchangeable; there is a constant passage from subject to object and quality which entails that the subject is always already object and quality for another subject.

The reference to a “subject” need not be taken to lead back to the transcendental subject as the terminus of the interpretation. The “somebody” to which a semiotic relation refers might just as well be another “something”.\textsuperscript{20} A new plant, for example, may be conceived as the interpretant of a pollen grain having stood to an ovule for the plant that the ovule would be after pollination (W1 1865, 333). The interpreting subject is thus not to be submitted to the constraints of anthropology. Rather, it is a mobile limit or a junction that any-thing and any-body can occupy to generate novel meaning. Of course, the three coordinates—ovule, pollen grain, flower—may be considered separately. This separation, however, is a convenience of reason. Both logically and ontologically, no component can be called upon without the others also being continuously engaged; the relatum is always already relation. Insofar as ovule, pollen grain, and flower do not pre-exist the relation but are mutually determined by it, they are constructed through mediation. Insofar as ovule, pollen grain, and flower stand to themselves for themselves, they are also revealed in their triadic relation. The Peircean sign is thus more than either of its elements and more than all of them taken together. Never a simple aggregate, it is differentiating and self-differentiating; it is the expression of a junctive semiotic process that both constructs and reveals the relata it connects.

This paradoxical process anticipates the function of the Existential Graphs as one that simultaneously “synthesises and shows” relations between terms. It may thus be said to be the metaphysical ancestor of the methodological diagram that Peirce employs later in his thought.\textsuperscript{21} This abstract diagram already distributes a series of possibilities and consequences that are critical in understanding Peirce’s intervention to the positivist dilemma. First of all, to the extent that semiosis is constructive of meaning it is also genetic: it is the ground of the creation of meaning where the rift between fiction and reality is rendered redundant. Each new sign is a diagrammatic fashioning of the real, which now becomes synonymous with the significance both the newly individuated sign and the relations that compose it acquire. Secondly, to the extent that semiosis is such a genetic process, its operation resists the structural closure of meaning. The difference at the junction presupposed and expressed by the diagram exposes signification to the constant evolution of relations. A sign may certainly be considered as a concrete fact of signification that is “structured” in terms of certain enduring relations. However, this structure is founded on process and as such it is best viewed as a habit the stability of which is contingently and not transcendentally guaranteed. The foundation of semiosis is thus only ever a shaky one; it is an ever-changing limit that signifies only to the extent that it transforms itself.

In the concept of love we find precisely the name Peirce gives to the impulse motivating the abovementioned transformation and a strange combination of monism and pluralism. The process of interpretation may be said to be monist in that it is indifferent to the actual signs produced: its minimum is that something stand for something else to something or someone. Nonetheless, it is not necessary that we take such indifference to exclude interest. Interest remains the very motor power of the diagram. Every new relation is ipso facto a vital thing, a significant element. The very gist of diagrammatic love therefore lies in the fact that it pluralises semiosis into different signs. It is this very pluralism that makes various interpretations matter differently across the physiological and psychological planes and diversifies them into species. Diagrammatic love encapsulates the very principle of growth; it may determine or construct a sign but it is
not deterministic. The passage from sign to sign is necessary but only contingently so. In other words, the diagram ensures that evolution happens—and that it sometimes happen with relative regularity—but does not limit the process to a certain outcome that must always be the same. It is for his very reason that the interpretative activity of the diagram is evolutionary, to “be understood in a very extended sense which can be explained by instances better than by a definition” (W2 1867, 54).

The function of the diagram

The main consequence of diagrammatic love in Peirce’s system is that the movement through which we interpret becomes a natural movement. If we can create meaning at all, this is because nature is doing it first by willing itself in its own signs. Peirce’s semiotic thus proposes a concept of nature as pure purpose, as “impulsive” and hence capable of its own ends expressed in its various constructs. As we saw, “creative love” is precisely the desire of nature to determine its own significance—it becomes the “erotic” element that distributes itself to creation without needing any transcendentally structured values other than those that are immanently produced in signify-ation (CP 1893, 6.287). As the constructor of signifying and significant fictions/facts, love is found in every single sign as the locus where all means and all ends converge and diverge.

From this standpoint, the schism between a name-giving consciousness and a sensible realm of “things” to be structured into meaningful clusters is rendered irrelevant. Of course, it remains possible to say that certain signs refer to us. Yet our mind does not make the sign any more than the sign makes our mind. Both are differentially related at and co-evolve from the common junction that is their source. We therefore find in Peircean semiotics a new theory of the subject as interpretant, founded on a metaphysics of un-conscious or abstract materiality that differentiates itself into meaning (W1 1865, 168–9).22 Beyond and before the activity of conscious subjects, there is seminal as nature, testifying to a vast and plural cosmic process of construction.

It is with the mutual construction of the sign in nature and nature in the sign mobilised by love that Peirce resists the dilemma between fact and fiction and the positivist purification of experience. Again, neither the human subject nor phenomenology are to be dismissed. Both, however, are to be transformed. As Ransdell puts it, when the subject interprets, it experiences “the actualisations of the generating powers of the signs themselves” and also itself as such an actualisation (1989).23 The lesson philosophy learns from the laboratory is therefore not that of objectively interpreting the world as an exercise in hermeneutics. No experimentalist true to their practice criticises another on having fashioned constructs or on whether these constructs uncover the Truth. As Peirce puts it, if you tell an experimenter that ‘the physicist … seeks for something deeper than the laws connecting possible objects of experience,’ that ‘his object is physical reality’ unrevealed in experiments, and that the existence of such non-experiential reality ‘is the unalterable faith of science,’ to all such ontological meaning you will find the experimentalist mind to be colour-blind (CP 1903 4.411)

Rather, what is actually significant for the experimenter is whether the construct or idea or fiction they propose “confers upon them the power of working out results in this world” (CP 1896 1.220). The mode of subjectivity of the experimenter is situated by the experiment itself that gives the phenomena examined the agency to test the accuracy of a question (CP 1903 5.168).24 Accordingly, the experimental logician is situated by the diagrammatic method, which gives the logical relations observed the power to interrupt the certainty of conscious reasoning (CP 1903 4.529).25 Laboratory-philosophy demands a subject whose superfluous phenomenological subjectivity be mitigated by the fact that it is just another sign embedded in nature as a system of signs equally capable of generating effects. As the experimenter so the subject is situated by the metaphysical diagrammatic fabrication of signs and their capacity to exact responses.26

The ability of pragmatic speculation to challenge the casual dismissal of signs as mere phenomena is indeed the gist of laboratory-philosophy. Here, however, arises a different question. The cosmologisation of semiotic love and the reconfiguration of human subjectivity proposed by Peirce’s speculative experiment may be a good fit for the positivist dilemma he sets out to resist. But is this cosmologisation relevant for politics? Even if we accept that diagrammatic love resists the structural closure of meaning, what does this process tell us about the value of what is interpreted into existence? Why should this natural impulse be called love in the first place? Are human agency and concerns mocked, or, worse, relativised? Are we faced with the irony of a signifying nature overshadowing the very plurality of signs it constructs? At this point, we are returned to the problematic we began this article with. The possibility of a cosmological semiotics of love leading to political indifference is as troubling as is the possibility of a vocal nature silencing the voice of those who have experienced it as a reductive and threatening concept. What needs to be addressed before anything is the first dilemma such questions invoke, which has to do with choosing between non-humans and humans. If
politics is taken to mean the affairs of the latter then Peirce’s diagrammatic love is hugely problematic. The cosmic impulse his semiotic invokes brings into the “social” field not only the signs human subjects produce but also *humans as signs*—whatever fashions itself within us but without us, including all the non-human interpretants that construct us in a vast unconscious manifold of relations. We can draw here a connection to the thought of Bruno Latour, who would find in the Peircean formula “all is sign” the semiotic confirmation of an immensely powerful “parliament of things” flooding a domain from which they were hitherto barred: “nature”, the “gods”, all the constructs and fictions that enlightened consensus was meant to correct and bypass on its way to a properly cosmopolitan society (Latour 1993; 144; 2014; 456).

Insofar as political imagination has hinged on this correction and has tried to ascertain objective reality through the interests of reason, Peirce thought does not lend itself to politics, indeed. The extension of ends to a signifying nature expressing itself in “the formation of worlds” (CP 1892–3 7.267) is a far cry from the “habitable earth” that Kant envisages ([1798] 2006, 33). Peirce is not sentimental about the ends of reason; far removed from pragmatic anthropology, experimental pragmatism cannot justify seeing in science an epistemological opportunity to arrive at a unified vision of the world by dismissing other worlds as constructs.22 In the activity of sign-formation, which is an interested one, every-thing affirms their purpose and reality. The vision of the cosmopolis itself, of a unified cosmos founded on the rational discarding of fictions, cannot be the cosmos proposed by Peircean semiotics.

At this point, however, we might stumble upon another problem: for all his evolutionism, is not Peirce famous for his insistence on the value of “rendering our ideas clear”? (CP 1878 5.388–410). Does not the pragmatic method also propose the Existential Graphs as devices of “ascertaining the real meaning of any concept, doctrine, proposition, word, or other sign”? (CP 1905 5.6; emphasis added) Moreover, is this method not marshaled to settle philosophical disputes? (ibid.) There is no denying that, as a logician, Peirce places great importance in that mode of thought that reasons and aims towards consistency. And yet the “reality of meaning” to which he refers cannot be thought outside the specific practice of logic. It is the function of logic to “pre-scind” and think about possibility in a given logical universe but whether or not the normative structures it creates should be taken to spell the closure of the possible altogether is another story.28 The formalisation the diagrams undertake is not to be thought apart from the form-giving semiotic process subtending it: “The difference between setting down spots in a diagram to represent recognised objects, and making new spots for the creations of logical thought, is huge” (CP 1892 3.424; emphasis added). It is exactly in this process of creation that we find the concentrated expression of semiotic love. The method of the logical diagram does not pre-exist its relations but is tempered by what it requires: the synthetic activity of signs that keep inquiry open and keep pragmatism a “fallibilist” practice (CP 1897 1.13).

The commitment to the risk of error seals the break of Peircean pragmatism from pragmatic anthropology. The clarity of consensus Peirce invokes cannot be taken as hardening back to what Deleuze would put as “what everybody knows” ([1968] 1994: 131, 171). Peirce’s consensus is the kind of “radicalism that tries experiments” (CP 1896 1.148; original emphasis). The truth of “any concept, doctrine, proposition, word, or other sign” is dependent on the situation into which it is consciously or unconsciously introduced as fitting or relevant and within which it must be tested. From this perspective, Peircean pragmatism cannot be taken as another grand paradigm or framework of explanation applicable to anything. Rather, it exposes itself as an experimental ethic, in the strict sense of “growing fictions”, as we saw, or habits to be constantly negotiated with every single act of experimentation.

The ethical orientation of pragmatism allows us to address the relevance of the concept of love for humans in a way that avoids cynicism. From the perspective of a cosmology of signs, disqualifying what is significant for each particular concretion and, in this case, what is significant for humans would be not just metaphysically unsound but also methodologically naïve. The cosmologisation of semiosis entails a mitigation of subjectivity, not the obliteration of that species of interpreters that are called humans or their different interpretations of what love means to them and how exactly it matters. It does prevent, however, both the “human” from becoming an unproblematic category and one true and politically worthwhile meaning of “love” from being prioritised over others.

I am referring here to the appeal of the real expressed in various propositions that a progressive politics of love is hindered only by love’s “corrupted” forms (Hardt and Negri 2009, 182) or certain groups’ “wounded attachment” to injustice (Brown qtd in Wilkinson 2016, 4) or the failure of lovers to be faithful to “the dialectic of being and event” (Badiou, 257). Of course, all these propositions are different and covering their subleties here is an impossible task. Nonetheless they can be said to be united in their effects, namely the future they would spell for what has come to be known as identity politics and the different concepts and practices of love it proposes. Whereas Hardt
would seem to converge with feminist and critical race theorists in protecting love from being reduced to “a process of unification”, he nonetheless deems the emphasis on identity to be animated by the “love of the same” (2011 677, 681; qtd. in Schwartz 2009, 815). His solution to “reactionary” divisiveness is a love that is “properly political” in that it “destroys conventional divisions” and generates a “field of multiplicity [...] through the encounter and interaction of differences” (2011, 678). On the other hand, Badiou’s neo-romantic proposal, which measures the political value of love against “faithful decisions” referring individual relations back to “pure events” (Badiou [1988] 2005, 257) results in a similar dismissal. As Williams notes, in Badiou such faithfulness is not allowed to be modified by its applications since it ontologically refers the purity of the event to a set of fixed relations (2007). From this angle, identity politics can only be read as “opposed to the encounter”, to the real experience of love (Badiou 2014).

The point in bringing up the above propositions and their opposition to readings of love that pay attention to identity is not to disqualify the true, or any other philosophical transcendental object, as a sign that matters. I may marshal a moment Sandra Rosenthal selects from Peirce here: “Unless we had first been convinced that there are real generals, [pragmatism] would never have entered our heads” (Peirce qtd. in Rosenthal, 98). These generals, however, cannot, be summoned as the “misunderstood” or “corrupted” reality behind fictions for they are constitutive of fictions and they are fictions themselves. To select an obvious example, Plato’s love produces certain effects as part of a philosophical experiment that proposes a mode of conduct appropriate to the citizen of a polis and is witnessed by those who take a stance concerning love’s presumed truth or falsity. One cannot expect, though, this concept of love to have the same truth or relevance for an indigenous modality of being that has not traditionally organised itself around a polis and is still suffering from the unrequested imposition of its structures (Means 1980). The truth of any sign is inextricable from the effects and affects it produces in a given milieu.

To the extent that it pays attention to the efficacy of signs, the pragmatic experimentation with the political value of love thus aligns itself with the multiple critical projects that have fleshed out the various effects of the concept. The power of romantic narratives positing heterosexual coupled and familial love as love’s natural locus (Jackson and Scott 2004; Jónasdóttir and Ferguson 2013); the implication of love with libidinal economies that commodify, fetishise and exploit female bodies and bodies of colour (McClintock 1995), the dubious connection between love and fascism (Ahmed 2003); the problem of idealisation as love’s main psychic motor (Silverman 1996)—all these critiques draw out the fictions that influence our experience of the sign and position us differently with regard to it. A pragmatic reading of love cannot dismiss the indigenous mistrust for the love of the priests who tried to salvage their souls in the name of God (Tinker 1993). But it also cannot dismiss the practice of self-love employed by queer and trans activists of colour as apolitical (Anzaldúa, [1988] 2009; Wilkinson 2009; Springer 2014) or the spiritual dimension of love as a tool for the healing and survival of those who continue to suffer at the intersection of various systems of domination (Lorde [1984] 2007; hooks, 1984, 2000; Nash 2013).

This refusal to dismiss is not a matter of political correctness but the consequence of cosmic semiosis itself. If anything, from the standpoint of semiotic evolutionism, those who have pluralised the sign of love by criticising and re-interpreting it may be considered as actors and participants in a series of speculative experiments that have persistently drawn attention to love’s effects in relation to tests that matter to humans differently. A pragmatic experimentation with the political value of love can only affirm the feminist and post-colonial political experiments that have pointed out all the non-human interpreters the sign “human” has carried with it—the abstractions, government structures, gender expressions, racial identities, class consciousness—and have helped evolve it by infecting it with other “fictions” with which it was not supposed to communicate in the first place. The question then whether cosmic love is worth saving is thus not meant to disqualify the destruction and (re-)invention of love as construct. All constructs, all signs, all interpretations can be destroyed and replaced by others. After all, this is the minimum requirement of Peirce’s semiotic evolutionism and what how signs evolve. What is to be resisted is such experimental pluralisation being submitted to the accusation of political fragmentation which indirectly makes the appeal to the “true” concept of love the only viable political option. What motivates my turn to diagrammatic love thus remains the schism between construction and reality but this time in relation to the dilemma it proposes for the value of love for politics, which may be condensed in the formula “true love or liberalism”. I am referring to the gesture whereby the “merely constructed” has become synonymous with the “merely relative” or the “merely cultural”, as Butler’s puts it (1998). The test in this case is to see whether diagrammatic love can challenge the familiar critical gesture that would return love to a question of truthfulness or get rid of it as politically unworthy.

From a pragmatic perspective, equating the pluralisation of love and its uses in politics with relativism
would be a case of making the latter the necessary consequence of the former. As we have seen, diagrammatic love is indeed expressed in everything, affirming that the world interprets itself in its signs or, to speak with Donna Haraway, "everything comes with its worlds" (1997, 137). On the level of process, love is said of every single sign or fiction—of gods, humans, plants or minerals—that are relatively determined in every junction as the locus of semiotic evolution. And yet the relative construction of signs that cosmic love ensures does not entail the absence of conflict or the absence of a ground through which a sign-construct may be discriminated as good or bad. It is simply that the cosmologisation of signification prevents this ground from becoming a transcent- dential moral horizon. The pervasive interrelatedness whereby "signs [are] affecting their interpretant signs" (CP 1904 8.191; original emphasis) takes away neither the capacity nor the necessity to discriminate. Discrimination, though, returns us to the ethical dimension of pragmatism. Put differently, it is a matter of experimental “conduct”, as Peirce repeats, involving that mode of acting that is informed by the ability of sign-worlds to co-determine our capacity to theorise and that always brings with it the risk of error (CP 1905 8.209). The relational aeffectivity of signs comes with the demand for a careful construction of worlds insofar as it guards itself from the submission of all differences to a cosmos that is already preexisting and unified and that remains to be revealed.

Admittedly, Peirce does not expand upon the connection between pragmatism and politics. Yet if a pragmatic political proposal is to be formulated, it has to do with this ethico-experimental attention to the effects of signs, the new worlds they generate and the attitudes these inspire when they encounter other, potentially divergent, worlds. It is in this sense that Peirce’s pragmatism may be brought in conversation with what Isabelle Stengers terms “cosmopolitics”—a relational ethic of constructing worlds that, instead of lamenting the relativism of truth, communicates with the "truth of the relative" (Deleuze qtd in Stengers 2002 2011, 281). Referring "to the unknown constituted by [...] multiple, divergent worlds" (ibid.), Stengers’ cosmos is a call for a politics that does not seek to unify differences under the guise of “tolerance”, the “virtue” that “makes agreement rhyme with submission” (513–514). To revert to Peirce’s terminology, the radically plural relationality of signs is not subject to a consensus that would go past divisiveness, in general, once and for all and at all costs. Signs may become general, they may be “prescinded” from the milieu within which they are born but they can never be abstracted from milieus or identities altogether. The pertinent political question thus becomes not how to construct a world that would be the same for everyone and go past identities but, as Stengers and Latour put it, one that is “common” (Stengers, 2005; Latour 2004b).

As a pragmatic affair, this common world would be an ongoing challenge, a constant attempt to keep the path of inquiry open, as we could say with Peirce—perhaps at the cost of a permanent feeling of unease but at least not at the cost of sacrificing worlds as dispensable perspectives on the “same” matter. Instead of defining differences in advance and telling the rational from the irrational, the real from the fictional, cosmopolitics attempts to figure the common experimentally. In Stengers’ words, the problem is to “slow down reasoning and create an opportunity to arouse a slightly different awareness of the problems and situations mobilising us” (Stengers 2005, 994). Of course, as it is pointed out, this slowing down does not come with the assurance of a solution. Constructing the common is a risky process, one that involves hesitation and does not necessarily entail “peace” (Latour 2004b, 456). It is also a process that calls for taking into account what is neglected, the potential absences of those who are precluded from or who have been hurt enough to not wish to participate in this construction, as de la Bellacasa notes (2011, 94–95).

As regards the difficult construction of this common world, the value of Peirce’s diagrammatic love would not be found in offering any type of guarantee. In synthesesing and showing—or in constructing and revealing—pockets of significance, the function of the diagram as method and ground is to continue to create working fictions, not immutable structures. The value of diagrammatic love for the composition of the common is found only it terms of what it saves: a concept of cosmic love that does not lose its relevance for humans or for politics, but only its capacity to realise, relativise and to render insignificant what matters to others and their experiments. Whether the concept is suitable for other problems is a matter of experimentation. It is true that Peirce himself blatantly dismissed signs that might have interrupted his own political views; in a sense, he failed the test of constructing a common world with others—his conservative views on suffrage and abolitionism in his native country are sad testimony to this. For those who insist on affirming the pluralisation of signs, it is matter of knowing how or even whether to inherit from Peirce. Given the entire history of philosophy and its uneasy relation with its “others”, this problem is not to go away any time soon. The call for affirming pluralism and the need for constructing common significance remains.
1. Citation policy: Quotations from Peirce’s *Collected Papers* are to be referenced in the standard manner of Peirce scholarship. These include the year after which the first numeral indicates the volume number and the number to the right of the point indicates the paragraph. Wherever the year is not included is an indication that the manuscript in question is undated. In the case of the Chronological Writings (W), I am providing the volume, the year and the page number (Peirce, 1931 1958).

2. I am referring not only to the post-Kantian responses to the problem of schematism and things in themselves as the limit of reason but also to Kant’s own discussion of teleological judgment in *The Critique of Judgment* that brings the transcendental subject in uncomfortable proximity with a concept of a purposeful nature challenging its critical authority. For excellent commentary on the latter see Deleuze ([1963] 1984).

3. The link between Peirce, Kant and the post-Kantians is not one that can be pursued in this paper. It suffices to say that besides Kant, who is one of the most dominant presences in his work, Peirce is conversant with Schiller, Schelling and Hegel and that his philosophy engages with familiar post-critical themes such as the reformed relationship between the faculties, the unconscious, and the possibility of articulating a philosophy of nature.

4. The pragmatic maxim, formulated in 1878, is as follows “Consider what effects, that might conceivably have practical bearings, we conceive the object of our conception to be. Then, our conception of these effects is the whole of our conception of the object” (CP 1878 5.1–5.2).

5. Peirce’s relation to Saussure’s semiotics, which is what is being hinted at here, needs to be reserved for a different body of work. There are intricacies in Peirce’s system that render it untranslatable into the Saussurean signifier/signified distinction and I wish to avoid the misunderstanding of the Peircean sign such an attempt would entail. By way of economy, I will restrict myself in saying that where Saussurean notion of the sign as “self-contained dyad” locks semiosis in human activity and lays the foundation for a structuralist methodology, Peircean tri-relative sign is the product of a natural metaphysics of significiation that, in involving non-human interpreters, recovers convention as habit, entails a different theory of the subject as interpretant, and draws a theory of differential continuity that allows the sign to evolve.

6. For a discussion of the possibility pragmatism opens up for speculative thought see Rosenthal (1986).

7. Ever since his very early writings from 1857, Peirce will attempt a canonical elucidation of his three nascent categories “I, Thou, It” (later to give way to Firstness, Secondness and Thirdness) in terms of love (W1 1857, 4) Love becomes the connective tissue for the affections of the soul, which opens up simultaneously onto a world of permanence, a world of causality and a world of community. In a system that can be said to respond to the Kantian faculties and their division, he offers classifications that are not based on human faculties at all but are unmistakably and unapologetically metaphysical. Love, for the young Peirce, brings together reason, affection, and sensation inasmuch as it brings together philosophy’s traditional transcendental objects of the good, the beautiful and the true.

8. See young Peirce’s elaborate attempt to systematise the categories “I, Thou, It” and the faculties in “The Modus of the IT” (W1 1861, 47).

9. The erratic posthumous publication of his work by Harthorne and Weiss has been only recently corrected by an endeavour of IUP press to publish his writings chronologically, which is still an ongoing process.

10. This misplaced trust, which Peirce will deem incapable of accounting not only for the genesis but also for the operation of logic itself, will acquire the name “seminary philosophy” (CP 1905 1.129)—to which he will include “Hegelian logicians” (CP 1893 4.69). The excessive reliance on demonstrative reasoning and the conflation of logic with “a branch of a science of quantity” (CP 1893 4.134) are topics that Peirce will never stop contesting.

11. Peirce is critical of the effects of epistemology on scientific thinking, which he defines as experimental, and this has partially to do with his conflicted attitude towards Kant, who remains one of the strongest philosophical presences in his work. On the one hand, he objects to the common interpretation of the Kantian “I think”, the referring of the unity of an object in thought to the unity of the ego at all times (W3 1872, 51). Yet on the other, he credits Kant with much of the confusion of what it means “to know”, the scope of science and its anthropological restraints. This is especially obvious when he discusses the Kantian understanding of synthesis, a sample of which is the following: ‘I have come to the conclusion that our primary conceptions are not simple but complex; that our elementary conceptions are not independent but linked complexedly together; that nevertheless properly speaking we have no à priori synthetical propositions and that axioms are only definitions (W1 1860, 9).

12. Peirce’s own phenomenological project, which he will idiosyncratically term “Phaneroscopy” in 1904 is telling in this regard. The constructive cosmology of love operative in Peirce indeed leads to a phenomenalism but of a thoroughly realist streak. Phaneroscopy will become a metaphysics of the phaneron, or, in accordance to our current terminology, of the sign as appearing, with the latter being disengaged both from a “real thing” it is supposed to correspond or a mind it is supposed to address (CP 1904–5 1.284). As a study of the “formal elements of the phaneron” (*ibid.*) Peircean phaneroscopy is set apart from Husserlian phenomenology insofar as it rides the former’s study of phenomena of the psychological or intentional hermeneutic element.

13. The nature of Peircean hypothesis or abduction is far too complicated to be covered in satisfactory subtlety at this point. It will be sufficient for the moment to say that it involves a re-reading of Kantian hypothesis and that it mobilises a type of cognition that the latter would relegate to the territory of intellectual intuition, as it invokes a passage from premise to conclusion that is not necessary. Very briefly, it is the “allowance to fabrication”.

Notes
((1770-1800) 1992, 224) this non-necessity implies that Kant is sceptical about, but which Peirce will read as fact-giving or creative experiential junction where subject and object meet (W1 1865, 283).

14. In his rather acerbic sense of humour Peirce will say: “I should have ventured to say that nothing is more foolish than carrying a question into a laboratory until reflection has done all that it can do towards clearing it up—at least, all that it can do for the time being. Of course, for a seminary-philosopher, to send a question to the laboratory is to have done with it, to which he naturally has a reluctance; while the laboratory-philosopher is impatient to get a whack at it” (CP 1893 4.69).

15. This development will have to do with Habermas’ and Apel’s readings of Peirce, but also Rorty for whom Peirce “[remains] the most Kantian of all thinkers—the most convinced that philosophy gave us an all-embracing ahistorical context in which other species of discourse could be assigned its proper place and rank” (Rorty [1982] 1991, 161). Given Rorty’s neo-pragmatist orientation and his taste for linguistic nominalism and relativism, his comment showcases the magnitude of his discomfort with Peirce’s evolutionary philosophical system that, precisely in being evolutionary, puts forth a far more sophisticated thesis than that of absolute truth or absolute necessity. From a Peircean perspective, Rorty’s relativisation of truth would not simply be a disregard of the pragmatic method but also the infection of philosophy with “the seeds of death” (CP 1908 6.485). Susan Flack’s staged dialogue between Peirce and Rorty using their own words is a brilliant sample of what the encounter of the two thinkers might look like (“‘We Pragmatists: Peirce and Rorty in Conversation” 1998, 31–47). I concur with Rosenthal (1994), Smith (1978) and Pepe, all of whom see Peircean metaphysics as a foundation for the pragmatic method (1984).

16. For a thorough discussion on the exceptional innovation of the graphs in terms of Peirce’s topological thought see Zalamea (2003).

17. With Peirce’s formulation of feeling or experience as “purposeless” in 1908, we see the expression in Peirce of the late Kantian mindset of the free accord of the faculties into an aesthetic of thought that allows the “muser” to affirm the intuitive and free production of signs (CP 1908 6.461).

18. To use Peirce’s words: “By ‘semiosis’ I mean […] an action, or influence, which is, or involves, a cooperation of three subjects, such as a sign, its object, and its interpreter, this tri-relative influence not being in any way resolvable into actions between pairs” (CP 1905 5.484).

19. [A] sign has, as such, three references: 1st, it is a sign to some thought which interprets it; 2nd, it is a sign for some object to which in that thought it is equivalent; 3rd, it is a sign, in some respect or quality, which brings it into connection with its object (W2 1868, 223; original emphasis).

20. Peirce is quite unambiguous on that aspect: “This subject, which must not be supposed to be a mind though it may be a human representation, and which is only that which is determined by the representation to agree with it in its reference to the object on that ground,—this subject is an abstraction” (W1 1865, 335; original emphasis).

21. See Zalamea (2012).

22. Peirce’s astounding exposition of a concept of abstract materiality, which is beyond the scope of the present article, is already articulated in the manuscripts of 1865, where we find that “[the] metaphysical logos is no more […] than the metaphysical soul or the metaphysical matter” (W1 1865, 168–9).

23. The translation from the French into English is Ransdell’s and can be found online at: http://www.iupui.edu/~arisbe/menu/library/aboutcsp/ransdell/PHENOMHTM.

24. As Peirce puts it, “The question is, Will this be the result? If Nature replies ‘No!’ the experimenter has gained an important piece of knowledge. If Nature says ‘Yes,’ the experimenter’s ideas remain just as they were, only somewhat more deeply engraved. If Nature says ‘Yes’ to the first twenty questions, although they were so devised as to render that answer as surprising as possible, the experimenter will be confident that he is on the right track, since 2 to the 20th power exceeds a million” (CP 168).

25. As he puts it, “Chemists have […] described experimentation as the putting of questions to Nature. Just so, experiments upon diagrams are questions put to the Nature of the relations concerned” (CP 1903 4.529). On the mode of experimental reasoning involved in the diagram he adds: “It is not by a simple mental stare, or strain of mental vision. It is by manipulating on paper, or in the fancy, formulæ or other diagrams—experimenting on them, experiencing the thing. Such experience alone evolves the reason hidden within us and as utterly hidden as gold ten feet below ground—and this experience only differs from what usually carries that name in that it brings out the reason hidden within and not the reason of Nature, as do the chemist’s or physicist’s experiments” (CP 4.86).

26. It is the same situatedness that can be said to prompt the link between philosophy and mythology, as we saw in the very beginning of this article; their objects, practices and goals may be different but the raw material of both are fictions.

27. ’By far the most interesting aspect of the history of science, is that it shows how an important department of human thought has been developed from generation to generation, with a view of comparing this growth with the historical development of art, of religion, of politics, and of institutions generally, and not only with historical development but also with the growth of the individual mind, and not only of mind, but of organisms both in their geological succession and in their individual development, and with the formation of worlds, and even with the gradual coming into being and crystallization of the fundamental laws of matter and of mind’ (CP 1892–3 7.267).

28. Peirce argues that the confidence of the experimenter or experimental reasoner who thinks in relation to specific problems cannot be confused with the definite probability assigned to a theory by affirmative experiments, as in Laplace: “you cannot ask what the probability is that the law of universal attraction should be that of the inverse square until you can attach some meaning to statistics of the characters of possible universes. When Leibniz said that this world is the best that was possible, he may...
have had some glimmer of meaning, but when Quetelet says that if a phenomenon has been observed on m occasions, the probability that it will occur on the (m + 1)th occasion is (m + 1)/(m + 2), he is talking downright nonsense” (CP 5.169).

29. To express this all-permeating love, Peirce will even call this semiotic impulse “god” (CP 1910 6.490; 1905 8.206). Yet before dismissing this gesture as unnecessarily theological, one needs to be reminded of Peirce’s experimentalism and of the function “god” as another yet sign serves in particular. God is needed by Peirce’s experimental philosophical device to affirm every sign; it is needed to reintroduce a love for constructs so that the experimenter be able to partake of the creation of meaning without being at war with the un-conscious stream of nature and without having to dismiss worlds created by other experiments.

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