

**EDUCATING FIRSTNESS:
AN ENQUIRY INTO PEIRCE'S DOMAIN OF *FIRSTNESS* AND
ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR AESTHETIC EDUCATION.**

By Cary Campbell¹

Abstract: This paper examines how the Peircean concepts of 'Firstness' and the related notion of 'quale-experience' can illuminate certain aspects of the learning process not conventionally addressed; specifically the pre-interpretative stage of cognition. I propose that reflecting on 'moments of Firstness' can bring the addressee to a more phenomenological treatment of the particular experiences and qualities they are reflecting upon, and through this reflection induce them to address the fundamental qualities that drive later stages of interpretation. My aim here is to explore what stimulates engaged absorption and examine how this can be applied to form an 'education of inquiry' that places reflection on this pre-interpretative stage in a central role.

¹Simon Fraser University- Canada, Doctoral candidate, clc25@sfu.ca

1. Introduction

1.1 My Firstness Moment

Art is an objectification of a purely experiential pattern... a recollection of emotion in tranquility. The process of expression or objectification is an idealization of the [original] experiential pattern. It grasps the central moment of the experience and unfolds its proper implications, apart from the distortions, the inferences, the accidental intrusions that would arise in the concrete experience itself (Lonergan, 1993, p217-219).

I have summoned Lonergan's words here precisely to address this sort of recollection, but also for the personal reason that it was through reading these exact words that the ideas forming this paper clicked into place in a sudden and powerful (for me at least) moment of inspiration. I am sharing this personal detail with the reader because it is precisely these sorts of moments that I will be exploring in this text.

1.2 Moments of Ineffability

We have all experienced moments that are so powerful and singular they seem to extend outside and beyond ordinary and mundane experience, something we could almost brand with the misleading label '*transcendental*'. In the romantic words of CS Lewis these transformative moments consist of "a stabbing, a pang, an inconsolable longing" (1955, p72). These epiphany-like moments are generally understood by scholars and artists throughout history as being ill suited to expression in our tautological and self-referential languages. They are a spark so fleeting and ineffable the very acts of recognition and reflection seem to destroy them. These moments of ineffability represent the unique synthesis of often diverse qualities into a moment of "*atemporal singularity*", that is a moment outside of our own conceptions of self and the cultural systems we use for expression. They occur in a hypothetical stage of perception before any sense data pertaining to this "bundle of qualities" has entered into the realm of discursive thought. They are hypothetical as well as paradoxical; they exist as moments outside of any awareness of our own subjectivity, yet our only methods and tools to examine them are necessarily absorbed within the semiotic systems we use to constitute reality. Thus, we can only hypothesize their occurrence and their nature.

1.3 Why the Art Object?

Through the aesthetic experience we can become transported outside the realm of our normal cognitive processes. The types of experiences I am describing, which til now have only been referred to as ‘moments of ineffability’, are in no way necessarily tied to art objects. This said I do believe the work of art provides a useful pedagogical model for two principal reasons:

Firstly, in accordance with Lonergan, the powerful synthesis the art object performs --- the coming together of disparate parts into a concrete whole, a unified package of qualities ready to be perceived --- makes it possible to return to the art object. Upon reflection we can better understand what qualities in it ignited these singular moments of absorption in ourselves, the spectator. This rests on the assumption that the art object captures and preserves an *imprint* of the singular experiences aroused in our perception within its structure and organization. A personal imprint based on our previous interpretations, that we realize or retrieve to understand more about our own engagement and through abstraction the interpretative process as a whole.

Secondly, the art object is particularly suited to the ignition of these moments of transformative engagement because of its ability to arrange and combine known materials in an unfamiliar way. This is expressed well by the poet Wallace Stevens’ famous statement, which I paraphrase; “*poetry makes the visible a little hard to see.*” Through reflection on this fleeting moment of disorientation we can perhaps gain a level of introspection into what qualities in the interpretative process stimulated our engaged absorption. It is this reflexivity and the ability to challenge and take us by surprise (what Gadamer calls “being pulled up short”) that make the art object a useful pedagogical platform.

2. The Domain of Firstness

2.1 What is Firstness?

A concept that I have found most useful in elucidating these singular and transformative experiences is the concept of *Firstness* as developed by the American philosopher Charles Sanders Peirce:

Firstness is a philosophical state; one of Peirce’s three categories of being, the others being *Secondness* and *Thirdness*. Firstness is the pre-interpretative perception of initial qualities before they have been associated with any object or subject. It is the abstraction of a quality; the pure and singular sensation of a redness before the subject has absorbed and classified the sensation within her previous experiences. Once we recognize this quality in

relation to ourselves, as something distinct from us and acting upon our perception we have already entered the domain of 'secondness'. This is what makes Firstness so unattainable and transient. Secondness is already observed within time and space; it is the subject recognizing the phenomenon through the experience of these bundles-of-qualities resistance upon our Being. It is in this sense that Heidegger asserts that *Being* is only realized through resistance, or more generally through communion with other beings --- from us being thrown into the world where we perceive appearances but are in ourselves appearances.

Firstness on the other hand, is never spatial or temporal --- it is purely monadic and faces no exterior resistances or reactions. This is what Peirce called *quale-consciousness*.

The consciousness of quality is sentient, sense qualities. The consciousness of quality is not a 'waking consciousness --- but still something of the nature of consciousness. A *sleeping* consciousness, perhaps" (6.221). The fact that it is "sleeping" or "slumbering" does not make it less intense, "For it is the absence of *reaction* --- of feeling another --- that constitutes slumber, not the absence of the immediate feeling that is all that it is in its own immediacy." (Peirce in Sheriff, 1994, p6)

This idea that the qualities that make up our experiences of *Firstness* possess their own consciousness has implications for the 'education of inquiry' I am envisioning. It reminds us that not having the reflective tools to adequately reflect on and assimilate a transformative experience does not make it less intense for the person experiencing it, just perhaps less useful for their personal growth.

In our ordinary lives we are rarely presented with objects that call out to be questioned and engaged with. This is because our systems of knowledge and perception are so rigidified and determined that (most of the time) upon perceiving an object we are immediately aware of how it fits within our established cultural and epistemological systems. We experience a singular experience that encompasses a powerful sensation of redness. Due to the uniqueness of the time and place of the experience this particular 'redness' is nothing we have ever experienced. But in an instant this redness becomes merely 'this sort of redness' and finally just 'red' when we go to describe it. This is to say, we almost instantaneously attribute a feeling or quality to an object and classify that object as a token within a larger class of objects. This final step of interpretation and expression through symbols of language is an aspect of the domain of *Thirdness*, which we shall treat in Section 3.0 through a look at Peirce's semiotics.

2.2 An Education of Inquiry

I propose in this paper that reflecting on these moments of *Firstness* can bring the addressee to a more phenomenological treatment of the particular experiences and qualities they are reflecting upon, and through this reflection induce them to address the fundamental qualities that drive later stages of interpretation. My aim here is to explore what stimulates engaged absorption and examine how this can be applied to form an ‘education of inquiry’ that places reflection on this pre-interpretative stage in a central role. My hope is that educators who possess the means to reflect on this realm of *Firstness* will be better equipped to stimulate the types of transformative aesthetic engagements with art and culture that scholars like Maxine Greene placed at the centre of her vision for education.

2.3.1 Quale Examined

Firstly, it will be necessary to enlarge our understanding of *Firstness* by examining the before mentioned concept of ‘quale’, as expounded upon by Peirce. One of the earliest references to this elusive concept came from the twenty six year old Peirce’s 1866 Lowell lectures entitled “The Logic of Science; or, Induction and ‘Hypothesis’”. Here Peirce says:

Our first impressions are entirely unknown in themselves and the matter of cognition is the matter of fact and what is not a question of a possible experience is not a question of fact. The impressions are grasped into the unity which the mind requires... by conceptions and sensations. (1866/1982:471)

These unknown and ineffable impressions are the raw content that the mind uses to create meaning through conceptualizing this data into the symbols of discursive thought. Because these ‘qualia’ are ‘impossible to describe’ yet form the basis of experience they must be made to refer to a *Ground*. A *Ground* is the abstraction of an initial quality, like how blackness is the pure abstraction of the singular quality of black experienced through a ‘quale’. It marks the beginning, the *terminus a quo* of the cognitive process. Umberto Eco explains this concept of ‘the Ground’ cogently in “Kant and the Platypus”:

The Ground, insofar as it is a quality, is a predicate... the Ground has to do with ‘internal’ qualities, the properties of the object. In ‘*The Ink is black*’ the quality ‘black’ or, rather, blackness embodied by the ink, is abstracted from it... Nonetheless, even from a logical standpoint, the Ground is not the totality of markers that make up the intension of a term (such a totality can

be ideally realized only during the process of interpretation): in *prescinding*, attention is paid to one element by neglecting another. (2000, p61)

By predicating the blackness of the ink, we ignore its liquid quality, or any other particular quality we experienced in our encounter. In short, as we make this leap from unreflective perception to conceptualization, we alter the wholeness of the initial ‘quale’.

Here we reach an important corner stone in Pragmatic thought, the notion of “meaning without truth” (Peirce, 1866/1982:477). Expression through symbolization, though a necessary step in the extension of human understanding and thought, shuts out further truth seeking. Once a quality is made refer to a ground which is then expressed through conceptualization with terms and symbols, we cannot return to speaking about the initial quale, which is ironically the very foundational object of what we speak of, or perhaps, more appropriately that *which drives us to speak*. Peirce explains this concisely in the Lowell Lectures: “To assign a name to a thing is to make a hypothesis. It is plainly a predicate that is not in the data” (472-473). Through this formulation our initial impressions are however not forgotten. No, they are understood as they act upon our subjective selves as a sensation. And “sensation is... the writing on the page of consciousness. Conception is the meaning of the sensation” (472-473).

This is to say, that once we attempt to express and formulate our experiences (to others and even ourselves) we enter the realm of linguistic systems --- which as late Wittgenstein and many others have demonstrated, are always circular and self referential. This necessary transformation from a moment of pure singularity (quale, firstness) to a state of generality (language, thirdness) represents a logical necessity in constructing meaning and unity out of experience, but still, we must remember this is *uni-directional system*. Once you recognize the quality acting upon your perception and proceed to construct meaning out of it through the generalization inherent of language, there is no going back to that initial ‘quale’. These very concepts of ‘quale’ and ‘firstness’ are in themselves attempts to examine the very forces that drive thought, and since we are attempting this examination the only way we are able, through symbols and language, we can only hypothesize their existence. As a scientist hypothesizes the existence of atoms through tests, though the atoms are never themselves visible. By attempting this inquiry we can hopefully gain insight into these foundational moments of interpretation and human understanding.

2.3.2 Quale Experience

In her book “Philosophy in a New Key”, Sussane K. Langer asserts that “it is not the essential act of thought that is symbolization but an act essential to thought and prior to it” (Langer, 1957, p41). We are far too absorbed within the clutches of language (both natural and linguistic) to momentarily step outside and look at it. For these *quale* are the very material furnished by the senses that we can only understand through acts of symbolization, and as Langer reminds us “*symbolization is the essential act of mind*” (Langer, 1957, p41). I will be returning to touch on this notion throughout this paper, especially in Section 3.1 on Peirce’s sign theory.

It should be emphasized that ‘quale’ consciousness is not the mind taking in a single object. Such a reductive and vicious dualism would never appear in Peirce. Quale refers not only sensory experience, but an enveloping and general feeling that encompasses all the senses, the subjects entire acquired experiences, as well as the unique temporal and contextual feeling of the experience.

The quale-consciousness is not confined to simple sensations. There is a peculiar quale to purple, though it be only a mixture of red and blue. There is a distinctive quale to every combination of sensations so far as it is really synthesized --- a distinctive quale to every work of art ---- a distinctive quale to this moment as it is to me --- a distinctive quale to everyday and every week ---- a peculiar quale to my whole personal consciousness. I appeal to your introspection to bear me out in this. (CP6.223)²

This quotation sheds light on my insistence on referring to a, some would say, outdated notion of ‘art object’. The art object stimulates for us the wholeness of experience that the quale embodies. It is my belief that all experiences possess this characteristic *wholeness* before they become segmented or ‘diced up’ through language. Language highlights and reveals one aspect of an experience and simultaneously buries and conceals another. Through this generalization process the experience is changed. Peirce saw this link to the work of art as a powerful representation of quale-consciousness; a way of reigniting the unique wholeness of the ‘quale; for introspection:

When we hear a sonata of Beethoven’s the predicate of beautiful is affixed to it as a single representation of the complicated phenomena presented to the

²This particular numbering system refers to the 8-volume “Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce”. For this example; paragraph 223 of volume 6. Otherwise I have been quoting from the still in progress “Chronological Edition” which is slowly superseding the former.

ear. The beauty does not belong to each note or chord but to the whole.
(Peirce, 1986/1982, 472)

2.4 Mimetic Education

This process of *reigniting* for the sake of revealing something concealed underneath our solidified interpretations, I call *mimetic education*. Turning to the art object as an “objectification of an experiential pattern” in the hope of reaching a better understanding of the initial moments of aesthetic experience is an act of *mimesis* --- for the ‘quale’ is never attainable once we have entered the domains of *Secondness* and *Thirdness*. We can only mimic this ‘Firstness’ through dialogue with one another and the world we are thrown into.

This is why I see language and discussion as essential tools in revealing to ourselves the power of an experience. It is only through acts of dialogue in the Gadamerian sense that we can thoroughly absorb these transformative experiences. In the spirit of the hermeneutic tradition we are not seeking an end; this is no ‘quest for certainty’ as Dewey would say. Through these acts of reflection and inquiry we are only trying to understand our changing self (a conception of part) as it relates to the changing world (a conception of whole); a constant and rapid dance that grows and remains active throughout our lives. The notion of truth I am adopting for this type of education, like hermeneutics, represents something that when adhering to the laws of logic, appears as a fallacy. Because meaning is always contextual, and there is always more whole to realize as well as more parts to relate, Hermeneutic knowledge is always imperfect and metamorphosing.

2.5 Revising the Art Object

Many philosophers have suggested that our inclination towards forms, towards creating wholeness and unity out of experience, may in fact be an internal human presupposition. Langer asserts as much when she states “our merest sense-experience is a process of formulization” (Langer, 1957, p89). Here we arrive at a necessary re-envisioning of the classical notion of “object,” from a clear and distinct phenomenal object into something more dynamic and fluctuating. “An object is not a datum, but a form which is all at once an experienced individual thing and a symbol for the concept of it, for this sort of thing” (Langer, 1957, p89). This awareness of the altering nature of symbolic expression is necessary to adequately understand ‘Firstness’ and our enquiry of it through mimetic education. This informs the understanding of object I will be adopting throughout this inquiry: *The mental*

abstraction of a manifold of qualities into a unity --- a wholeness that allows the subject to relate this complex network of qualities to their previous experiences. This is the process the art object performs and again justifies my emphasis on the aesthetic component of these moments of ‘Firstness’.

3. Peirce’s Semiotics

3.1 What is a Sign?

Now with a re-envisioned understanding of the classical object and how it relates to quale experience let us dip our feet into the often daunting world of Peirce’s semiotics; the exclusive domain of thirdness but yet our only way of approaching any notion of ‘firstness’ and thus a necessary step in our journey:

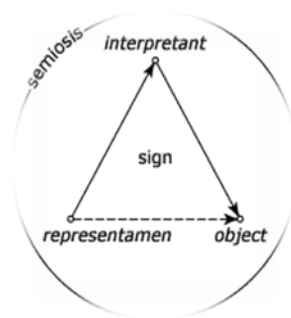
Semiotics provides a useful toolbox to assist us in phenomenological enquiry. The discipline of semiotics asserts that we perceive and communicate reality through systems of signs that are directly conditioned by our acquired experiences, both personal and cultural. By signs we do not simply mean conventional signs but anything that stands for something else. David Chandler explains that “signs do not just 'convey' meanings, but constitute a medium in which meanings are *constructed*. Semiotics helps us to realize that meaning is not passively absorbed but arises only in the active process of interpretation...” (Chandler, 2002, p217) As Thomas Hobbes eloquently states in Leviathan I, 3; “A signe, is the Event Antecedent, of the Consequent; and contrarily, the Consequent of the Antecedent, when the like consequences have been observed before: and the oftener they have been observed, the lesse uncertain is the signe.” Peirce and Eco’s contribution to Hobbes’s definition is the recognition that signs are always cultural units: A sign is “everything that, on the grounds of a previously established *social convention*, can be taken as something standing for something else” (Eco, 1976, p16). This is to say that how humans arrive at conceptions of meaning and truth is not through the uncovering of some *a priori* or fundamental knowledge; rather, meaning is always a changing and growing cultural product. This is exemplified by common sense experience. The information and concepts we use to construct meaning out of our realities is mostly made up of things that we have not directly experienced, that we take on authority. The new born infant is perhaps, in the very initial stages of her life, interpreting reality predominantly from her direct experiences as it is presented to her senses. But very quickly as

she develops the capacity for language (and more fundamentally sign recognition), concepts and ideas she has never seen or touched infect and affect her world view.

3.2 Unlimited Semiosis

In order to properly address the interpretative process and how it relates to the domain of ‘Firstness’, we must examine the Peircean model of the sign and the concept of *unlimited semiosis*.

Unlimited semiosis reflects a fundamental quality of all language systems; it is the process by which “infinite linguistic strings can be produced” from within the same system (Eco, 1996). The dictionary provides us with an elementary example of this process. When we look in the dictionary for the meaning of a term we get synonyms and images, essentially other words and concepts which we then have to look up to convert into other words and so on ad infinitum. Let us look at this process in more detail by addressing the semiotic triangle as developed by Peirce:



The representation of the sign, or the *representamen* (that is the form of the sign or its signifier) represents an immediate object (that which the representation refers to). These two entities in their combined union make up a sign vehicle. This binary structure is tightly woven together: for examples think of a cloud that forebodes rain, or the word “cat” that evokes a mental schema of a cat. When this sign vehicle is interpreted it triggers a new sign in the mind of the interpreter, which is called the *interpretant*. The *interpretant* is not to be confused with the signs interpreter but is merely “that which guarantees the validity of the sign” (Eco, 1979, p69). It is the constantly evolving result of a community’s interpretation of a particular sign vehicle, or as Eco explains; “a collective, public, observable product laid down in the course of cultural processes” (Eco, 2000, p3). The *interpretant* upon being interpreted becomes a new sign vehicle pertaining to the same object, thus we have the process of semiosis. Peirce elaborates:

The object of representation can be nothing but a representation of which the first representation is the interpretant. But an endless series of representations, each representing the one behind it, may be conceived to have an absolute object as its limit. The meaning of a representation can be nothing but a representation. In fact, it is nothing but the representation itself conceived as stripped of irrelevant clothing. But this clothing never can be completely stripped off; it is only changed for something more diaphanous. So there is an infinite regression here. Finally, the interpretant is nothing but another representation to which the torch of truth is handed along. (CP1.339)

The torch of truth analogy is another useful device to elaborate the before mentioned pragmatist's concept of 'meaning without truth'. Put as succinctly as possible, unlimited semiosis tells us that a sign is understood only through other signs. This is to say that once we attempt to express and formulate our singular experiences (to others and even ourselves) we enter the realm of linguistic systems --- which, as we have said in section 2.3, are always circular and self-referential.

We would like to believe that language can reach out and touch the 'quale' or some dynamical object at the foundation of perception with the exactitude of a scientific method. This is yet another iteration of the Socratic myth of the "knowing subject"; the belief that words point to underlying essences. This is not possible, for alas signs can only refer to habitual connections among signs; in other words they are "grounded" in human belief which is not something fixed but rather 'contingent' and open to revision.

The following is one of Peirce's clearest descriptions of a sign. In it he also explains the before mentioned concept of Ground (Section 2.3 above).

A sign or *representamen*, is something which stands to somebody for something in some respect or capacity. It addresses somebody, that is creates in the mind of that person an equivalent sign, or perhaps a more developed sign. That sign which it creates I call the *interpretant* of the first sign. The sign stands for something, its object. It stands for that object, not in every respect, but in reference to a sort of idea, which I have sometimes called the ground of the *representatmen* (CP 2.238).

Sheriff, a prominent Peirceanscholar, has made the useful connection of comparing the concept of *Ground* to Wittgenstein's notion of 'language games'.

The Grounds, language games, uses, habitual connections, beliefs are at the basis of all rationality. For a sign even to be thought it must involve a ground. Hence all thought is grounded in habits of thought that are the product of prior volitional acts and social conditioning. (Sheriff, 1994, p49)

This comparison reminds us yet again that truth is always something constructed, through a *piling up* and accumulation of cultural beliefs and habits. This also reminds us that our only experience of *firstness* is achieved through the mediation of *thirdness*. Whenever we think,” Peirce says, “we have present to the consciousness some feeling, image, conception or the representation which serves as a sign... to some thought which interprets it.” (CP 5.238) This is saying that the initial experience that we abstract into a Ground and then a representation (a *first*) in and of itself is merely a quality, which is gone before we can even conceive it. For this reason the thought which interprets this first, the *interpretant*, is necessary for thought to occur in general. Sheriff summarizes this process concisely: “The only way a sign can stand for any object, regardless of how complex or artificial is by referring to it through previous thought” (Sheriff, 1994, p137).

3.3.1 Aesthetics through Ethics

Semiotics tells us that meaning of signs is always something *virtual*; “it lies not in what is actually thought [immediately present], but in what this thought may be connected with in representation by subsequent thoughts...” (CP: 5.289) Thus to understand the process of semiosis is to address the realm of all human understanding, of which *firstness* and *quale* are the bedrock. Although it is by nature unattainable, Peirce evidently believed that through reflection on moments of *firstness* we can realize some ultimate aim that extends beyond human conduct and reasoning. For Peirce this greater aim is merely a reflection of all his work, the trend of everything in the universe to progress from a state of indeterminacy ---a state of pure quality --- to a state of generalization. This is the progression from *firstness* to *thirdness*, which Peirce translates as the gradual perfection of reason, both in terms of a grand cosmology and in terms of human conduct.

In contrast to much of Peirce’s work, his aesthetics is jarringly comprehensible --- even beautiful in its simplicity. To distill its essence in one sentence, Peirce believed that all deliberate human conduct is shaped and moulded after these singular moments of pleasurable feeling --- our subjective aesthetic experiences. This understanding of ethics does not demand an absolute or universal rule based ethics but is rather a form of artistry that cannot be reduced to a simple codification. The subject deliberately shapes their conduct after their private aesthetic experiences. As a community it is the merging together of our collective

aesthetic judgements that shape our fundamental methods of valuation; distinguishing what is good from bad, what is pleasurable from not pleasurable.

To understand how this process occurs, it is useful to contrast aesthetic experience from aesthetic judgement. Sheriff describes aesthetic experience as “the feeling of a quality embodied in an action or object, a feeling that is remembered in a subsequent aesthetic judgement” (Sheriff, 1994, p67). It is important to remember that for Peirce “aesthetic judgements... are neither good nor true” in themselves (Sheriff, 1994, p68). What makes them so fundamental to human experience is their ability to synthesize isolated qualities into a greater whole which leads to the formation of ‘habits of feeling’. It is these habits of feeling that determine deliberate conduct even once they become so habitual we no longer remember their initial aesthetic qualities. This synthesis creates a mental formula that at its core is still associated with these initial moments of pleasurable feeling. Like his Italian contemporary Croce, Peirce believed aesthetics to be a propedeutic to the normative sciences of ethics and logic. Sheriff explains:

Good aesthetics is the deliberate formation of habits of feeling that lead to good actions and good logic. The essence of these sciences [ethics, logic, and aesthetics] is controlled thought, controlled conduct and the formulation of habits of feeling. (Sheriff, 1994, p62)

3.3.2 Refined Hedonism

This notion of the aesthetic finds parallels with the Kantian notion of “disinterest.” The aesthetic mind has no motivation in possessing the object of its attention; it simply wants to enjoy and experience it. One can certainly see how this quality of *disinterest* can be applied to shape and influence ethical practice and even phenomenological analysis. When we gaze upon something disinterestedly we are not using it; absorbing it into a greater system where it can serve some other end. We are merely perceiving the phenomenon for how it presents itself to us, how it makes us feel. From here we can proceed to address our preconceptions and bias’ but only after the phenomenon is properly treated. It is in this sense that Peircean and Kantian aesthetics can be understood as a form of *refined hedonism*. I find this designation useful, if only as a reminder of the importance of pleasure inherent in any act of engaged learning.

Naturally no logical or ethical system is possible without adherence to some sort of standard or ideal. But if aesthetics leads to the formation of habits of feeling which dictate

logical and ethical action what is the ultimate aim of this action? Peirce insists that this can only be “a state of things that reasonably recommends itself in itself aside from any ulterior considerations. It must be an admirable ideal, having the only kind of goodness that such an ideal can have; namely, aesthetic goodness” (CP: 5.130). Since no logical system can be verifiable in a single case, logicity ensures that a private aesthetic ideal extends beyond a subject's own fate, to a conceived identification of one's interest with those of an unlimited community.

Logicity inexorably requires that our interests shall not be limited. They must not stop at our own fate, but must embrace the whole community... This community, again, must not be limited, but must extend to all races of beings with whom we can come into immediate or mediate intellectual relation. It must reach, however vaguely, beyond this geological epoch, beyond all bounds. He who would not sacrifice his own soul to save the world, is, as it seems to me, illogical in all his inferences, collectively. Logic is rooted in the social principle. (CP 2.654)

Thus the ultimate aim of reason instills the sentiment of love and community.

4. Concluding Remarks

Concentration and mindfulness to ‘firstness’ and ‘quale’ is similarly about better understanding our own reactions and engagement with the world, in the hope that this attention will merge together with others to form positive habits of feeling. The theory and concepts that I have presented throughout this paper are not necessarily intended for dissemination to students. I have presented them to enrich educators’ understanding of Firstness as a useful reflective tool. I have attempted to present various paths to get at the core of these moments of ineffability: in the hope that educators will take the concepts and ideas that they find useful in developing their own personal education philosophies. In the spirit of Gadamer, my goal is to encourage “aesthetic attentiveness rather than make iconoclastic declarations about what the aesthetic is” (Davey, 2011). I have specifically focused on Peirce's often difficult and convoluted terms and concepts, not to alienate the reader, but because I believe Peirce is one of the only philosophers to adequately address this pre-interpretative stage in his work. I feel these concepts (such as quale, firstness, and its relation to the concept of unlimited semiosis) are necessary and pragmatic as they give us the means to talk about what is by its nature unspeakable. I see the task of this kind of education is in many ways very similar to Dewey's explication of the Role of Inquiry; “to distinguish immediate, unreflective values from those values worth retaining upon reflection because

their consequences contribute to human flourishing” (Garrison, 1999). Like Dewey's logic of inquiry, the concept of *firstness* provides us with a practical toolbox to grab hold of this transient sensation that I believe is at the core of learning engagement. What these concepts encourage is reflective mindfulness of the very moments that ignite in students, but also just people, transformative engagement, whether it be with a piece of art, a plastic bag, or a chemical reaction.

The philosophical notion of the 'continuum', as explored by the Danish semiotician LouisHjelmslev is a useful concept in this discussion. The continuum is the amorphous external stuff from which organisms etch out their realities. The continuum is not like Plato's hidden universe of ideal forms but rather is the very limits of being; the boundaries prescribed upon our perception. Eco compares the continuum to the grains in a log of wood. Different people can make many different things out of the same block of wood --- just as different life forms perceive reality differently --- however there are grains inherent in the wood that motivate how and which direction we cut. (Eco, 2000)

Firstness speaks to us from this inchoate void and is the spark that drives inquiry. Out of indeterminacy something grabs hold of us and absorbs our attention in such a way as to block out everything else and cause us to focus solely on it, the phenomenon. This is what Peirce called *primary indexicality*, which is what drives us to speak before we have spoke. We look to the art object because it embodies and concentrates this *firstness* before us into ‘a unified whole’; focusing our gaze for us, etching sense and meaning out of the continuum. It is in this sense that all art is a remembering --- an elegy for this fleeting moment of atemporal singularity, that is already dead once we have noticed it.

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