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## **Pragmaticist explorations: C.S. Peirce, the logic of inquiry and international relations**

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### **Abstract**

The philosophical tradition of Pragmatism has recently entered the fray of international relations (IR) debates. Pragmatism has so far been mainly employed in meta-theoretical discussions over the foundations of the discipline, and to address normative and methodological questions characterizing this field of studies. The main sources of inspiration in these discussions have been classic pragmatist writers such as John Dewey and William James. The work of one of the major figures of this tradition, Charles Sanders Peirce, has been by and large neglected in the literature. The claim advanced in this paper is that the application of some of the American philosopher's key insights, especially those regarding the logic of inquiry, to first order issues in world politics can enrich the current 'pragmatist turn' in IR and contribute to the expansion of the theoretical horizons of the discipline.

**Keywords:** International Relations theory; Pragmatism; Peirce; logic of inquiry

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## **Pragmatist explorations: C.S. Peirce, the logic of inquiry and international relations**

### **Introduction: bringing Peirce in**

The philosophical tradition of Pragmatism has recently entered the fray of International Relations (IR) debates (Bauer and Brighi 2008, Friedrichs and Kratochwil, 2009; Hellmann 2009; Kratochwil 2007; Rytövuori-Apunen, 2005). IR has thus followed the lead of other disciplines in the social sciences and humanities where a pragmatist revival has already taken place (Dickstein, 1998). Pragmatism, rather than a unified and coherent philosophical system, it is an ‘attitude’, a methodological approach to philosophical enquiry<sup>1</sup>. Although expressed in different ways, this attitude informs most pragmatist authors in IR in their attempt to make sense of – and problematize – International Relations as a discipline and its subject matter, namely world politics. Their main contribution has been to show that it is possible to go beyond the dead-end clash between allegedly incommensurable theoretical paradigms that characterize this field of inquiry and to expand its theoretical horizons.

Couched in these meta-theoretical terms, the applications of Pragmatism in IR have by and large mirrored those occurring in political and social theory (Festenstein, 1997; Baert and Turner, 2004). Pragmatist IR scholars have challenged traditional views of agency in international relations (i.e. the rationalist assumption of states as corporate, cost benefit calculating entities with given interests) and offered a more ‘social’ and open-ended perspective on who populates the international arena (Festenstein, 2002: 556). IR Pragmatist authors have also criticized the rationalist and empiricist assumptions underlying mainstream approaches for their disconnect from experience and called for a more situated, practically oriented type of inquiry (Kratochwil 2007; Hellmann 2009).

The main sources of inspiration for IR pragmatist authors have been classic writers such as John Dewey and William James. Deweyan pragmatism has been particularly influential in the discipline (Cochran, 2002; Widmaier 2004; Haas and Haas, 2002; Owen 2002; cfr. Festenstein 2001). Some of the classic pragmatists’ ideas have arrived to IR also through contemporary authors such as Habermas (see for example Risse, 2000). The work of one of the founders of this tradition, Charles Sanders Peirce (1839-1914), has been by and large neglected in the literature (Rytövuori-Apunen, 2005; Kratochwil 2007). Peirce shares the key tenets defining the pragmatist ethos. However, the American philosopher was

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<sup>1</sup> According to Richard Bernstein, there are six common themes that define the pragmatic *ethos*: the focus on practical consequences, fallibilism, the emphasis on the social nature of human life, antifoundationalism, contingency, and pluralism (Bernstein 1992: 326-9).

vocally opposed to the ways in which pragmatism was popularized by some of his illustrious contemporaries (especially James' 'voluntarist' and Dewey's 'instrumentalist' versions), and thus formulated his own model, which he called *Pragmaticism*<sup>2</sup>. According to Peirce, "Pragmaticism is not a system of philosophy. It is only a method of thinking (...), a theory of logical analysis, or true definition." (CP 5.212)<sup>3</sup>. This formulation of pragmatism is therefore narrower than the sense given by other pragmatist authors and more akin to *logics* (Peirce 1986; Gouge 1950). Yet Peirce conceptualizes logics in broader terms than the traditional meaning given to this domain of study. It does not merely refer to a set of abstract operations in an individual mind; instead its field of application has both a practical and social dimension. These dimensions are encapsulated in the model of scientific inquiry that Peirce proposes to account for how a community of inquirers achieves the 'fixation of belief', namely the re-establishment of the commonsensical understanding of the world that the periodical emergence of doubt undermines, and in the conceptual framework in which the analysis of this logic is inserted, namely Critical Commonsensism.

Rytövuori-Apunen argues that the promise of a Peircean model of enquiry in IR is that it can bring together rationalist, empirical and conventionalist approaches in the same network of discourse, while at the same time allowing the engagement of critical approaches with the mainstream of the discipline (Rytövuori-Apunen, 2005: 151; 166). I want to take this claim further, and argue that Peircean ideas can be used not only as meta-theoretical standpoint to debate the epistemological foundations of the discipline or to discuss its methodological or normative issues (see for example, Kratochwil 2007; Friedrichs and Kratochwil 2009), but also for addressing concrete empirical questions in world politics. In this paper I explore how a pragmatist logic of enquiry may be used as source for the formulation of a middle range theory<sup>4</sup> to study instances of radical policy shifts in world politics. Through this exercise, I also seek to demonstrate how Peircean ideas can contribute to the expansion of IR research agenda in debates about the types of 'logic of action' that guide policy actors on the world stage (Müller 2004) and the mechanisms underlying international norms' evolution (Finnemore and Sikkink 1998). To illustrate its explanatory potential, I apply a pragmatist model of policy change to examine an empirical case study. The selected case is that of the European Union (EU), arguably the pragmatist

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<sup>2</sup> On the differences between Peirce and other classical pragmatists, see Houser 2005: 729-739; Margolis 2002. See also footnotes 10 and 12.

<sup>3</sup> References to the collected Papers of Charles Peirce (CP) will follow the standard procedure of listing volumes and paragraph number in the reference.

<sup>4</sup> According to Merton (1949: 39), middle range theories are models that "lie between the minor but necessary working hypotheses that evolve in abundance during day-to-day research and the all-inclusive systematic efforts to develop a unified theory that will explain all the observed uniformities of social behavior, social organization, and social change".

experiment *par excellence* (Albert and Kopp-Malek 2002: 453-471). More specifically, in this paper I consider the recent establishment within the EU of a post-national regime to manage Europe's borders.

Before outlining the main tenets of the Peircean model of inquiry and its possible applications to the realm of international relations, a note of caution is needed. Peirce did not explicitly address social and political issues (Ward, 2001), let alone world politics. Peirce applied his ideas about the logic of enquiry mainly to the scientific field. Moreover, despite his emphasis on empirical research, he mostly dealt with meta-theoretical issues, and thus there are no ready-made middle range theories that can be easily transferred to other fields. These problems are compounded by the fact that Peirce's work is notoriously complex and open to various (and often contradictory) interpretations<sup>5</sup>. Despite these difficulties, the 'grafting' of Peirce to the social sciences, and IR more specifically, is nonetheless warranted. The author implicitly touched upon notions that are central to social theory, such as that of the symbolic, the semiotic, the dialogical, and the cultural (Wiley, 2006:24). Peirce himself hinted that his pragmatist logic could be used beyond the hard sciences. Some sociologists and anthropologists, and a growing number of scholars in neighbouring disciplines, have indeed followed his advice and creatively adopted his ideas in other social realms (Wiley, 2006: 28)<sup>6</sup>. This essay's main contention is that the same can be cogently done for world politics. Indeed, Peirce's insights about the logic inquiry and his critical commonsensism are consistent with recent IR scholarship that, inspired by sociologists such as Bourdieu and Foucault, has relied on 'practices' as main conceptual framework to understand world politics' underlying structures and dynamics<sup>7</sup>.

While highlighting the promise of adopting Peircean ideas in IR, it is necessary to recognize the limits of this endeavour. The most notable challenge has to do with a key component of any political analysis, namely power. This dimension is underspecified in the application of a Peircean model to study world politics that I present in this paper. In the concluding section, I therefore consider

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<sup>5</sup> The interpretation of Peirce's thought has for years provoked a wide disagreement amongst scholars. According to Goudge, "every interpretation of Peirce must be to some degree controversial" (Goudge, 1950: vii). This complexity, together with the lack of explicit treatment of political topics, may explain why Peircean ideas are rarely discussed in IR circles, while Dewey's more accessible and systematic version of pragmatism is more popular. Recently, however, a growing number of commentators have acknowledged the basic coherence and systematization of Peirce's thought (Santalla-Braga, 1993; Hausman, 1993; Houser and Kloesel, 1992).

<sup>6</sup> For sociology, see Halton, 1994, Rochberg-Halton, 1986, Sobrinho Blasco, 2001; for anthropology, see Parmentier, 1994; Singer, 1984. 'Peircean' scholars can be found also in psychology (Muller and Brent, 2000), economics (Samuels, 2000), literary studies (Rohr, 2003), education (Pietarinen, 2003) and legal studies (De Jong and Werner, 1998).

<sup>7</sup> On the 'practice turn' in IR, see Adler and Pouliot 2011; Brown 2012.

some possible ways in which this model might be further refined to take into account its central role in world politics.

### **Peirce, critical commonsensism and the logic of inquiry**

One of the central elements of Peirce's thought and, arguably, one of his most original contributions to the history of Western thought, is his conceptualization of the logic of inquiry. Peirce considered the Cartesian model of scientific investigation based on rationalistic methods and a solipsistic subject as an inadequate account of science because it missed the social and norm-oriented nature of scientific work (Parker, 2001: 2). To overcome doubt and 'fix belief' we should begin with all the prejudices we have developed over the years, not from abstract, a priori principles. As Peirce puts it: "in truth, there is but one state of mind from which you can 'set out', namely, the very state of mind in which you actually find yourself at the time you do 'set out' - a state in which you are laden with an immense mass of cognition already formed, of which you cannot divest yourself if you would" (CP 5.416). This state of mind is the existing commonsense. As long as it is taken as the accepted truth, commonsense is not questioned. The taken-for-granted beliefs that constitute it, however, are under constant scrutiny and can be challenged at any time. The recognition of the central role of doubt in human life represents the 'critical' element in Peirce's Critical Commonsensism. Doubt is also the initial trigger of inquiry. Indeed, Peirce talks about the 'irritation of doubt' as the state of mind that pushes inquirers to undertake their explorations.

Peirce identifies four methods for overcoming doubt and achieving the fixation of belief: tenacity, authority, *a priori*, and the method of science (Peirce 1877/1992). He criticizes the first three methods because they do not acknowledge the fallibility of beliefs. Only the final method distinguished by Peirce, the *method of science*, can successfully challenge the existing commonsense. This method consists of three closely interrelated types of processes: abduction, deduction and induction. Abduction is the first step, and the most innovative aspect of Peirce's model. Peirce defines abduction as 'the process of forming explanatory hypotheses' (CP 5.171), the 'only kind of argument which starts a new idea' (CP 2.96). The abductive formulation of new hypothesis is based on the observation of certain facts from which we suppose a general principle that, were it true, would account for the facts being what they are. In stylized form, an abductive type of reasoning looks as follows:

- The surprising fact C is observed.
- But if A were true, C would be a matter of course.
- Hence, there is a reason to suspect that A is true. (CP 5.189)

Abduction is thus near to guessing. Indeed, creativity and instinct play an important role in this operation. Paraphrasing Tennyson, Peirce said that “Wildest dreams are the necessary first steps towards scientific investigation” (Peirce 1958: 233; see also Kapitan 1990). In turn, instinct (or ‘insight’) helps interpreting potential clues that phenomena and experience offer (CP 7.220). The centrality of instinct in abduction means that this type of inference is a borderline case, “the closest reasoning gets to non-reasoning” (Anderson 1987: 42). Yet abduction is not arbitrary; the conclusions reached through this reasoning process are based not just on any guesses, but on *good* guesses (Paavola 2005: 26). Abduction also has practical implications, for it offers suggestions on what courses of action to pursue given the information and resources available (McKaughan, 2008: 456). Peirce’s originality is thus to show that there is a *reasonable* argument that accounts for the creation and pursuit of a hypothesis, and that insight and inference are not mutually exclusive. This is in sharp contrast to the traditional positivist and rationalist view that portrays induction as the only appropriate procedure of discovery and hypothesis-making as a fundamentally ‘irrational’ act (Chauviré 2002: 212-13)<sup>8</sup>.

Scientific inquiry does not end with abduction. A suggested hypothesis must be defined and examined more in depth to determine whether it meets its original expectations. The next step in the logic of inquiry is thus deduction. Deduction consists in figuring out the plausible consequences that would result from the acceptance of a working hypothesis. “The Deductions which we base upon the hypothesis which has resulted from abduction produce conditional predictions concerning our future experience. That is to say, we infer by Deduction that if the hypothesis be true, any future phenomena of certain descriptions must present such and such characters” (CP 7.115n). With deduction we thus prepare for action by considering various scenarios we might encounter in our endeavour.

In order to assess these predictions, and thus to form our final estimate of the validity of the hypotheses created through abduction and deduction, the inquirer needs to carry out some sort of experimentation. This process is what

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<sup>8</sup> For rationalists and positivists, inquiry begins with an irrational intuition that is not an inference made from observed facts. According to Popper, “The initial stage, the act of conceiving a theory, seems to me neither to call for logical analysis nor to be susceptible of it...my view of the matter, for what is worth, is that there is no such thing as a logical method of having new ideas, or a logical reconstruction of this process. My view may be expressed by saying that every discovery contains “an irrational element”, or “a creative intuition” in the Bergsonian sense (Popper, 1968:31-32). For Peirce, this argument is misplaced, since “(t)he elements of every concept enter into the logical thought at the gate of perception and make their exit at the gate of purposive action; and whatever cannot show its passport at both those two gates is to be arrested as unauthorized by reason” (CP 5.212). For further elaborations on the concept of abduction, see Walton 2004 and Magnani 2001.

Peirce calls *induction*. The experimentation (or ‘quasi-experimentation’ as Peirce calls it) that characterizes induction consists in “producing or searching out a state of things to which the conditional predictions deduced from hypothesis shall be applicable and of noting how far the prediction is fulfilled” (CP 7.115n8;)<sup>9</sup>. It is by looking at the results of these tests that inquirers are put in the position to validate a hypothesis, the first step towards the establishment of belief (Chauviré, 2005:216).

So formulated, Peirce’s conception of induction seems to coincide with the (logical) positivist principle of verification. Both rely on an experiential criterion of meaning, whereby a proposition must have some observable effect in the world to be meaningful. At a closer look, however, the two models are rather different. The first difference lies in the notion of experience. For verificationists, a verifiable experience is a directly observable one. Peirce, on the other hand, has a broader concept of experience. His ontological commitment to the reality of the hypothetical worlds created through the abductive process is rejected by verificationists. Similarly, verificationists do not share Peirce’s view that induction can be gradual, involving the “making [of] a new estimate of the proportion of truth in the hypothesis (or belief) with every new instance” (Peirce 1958: 369). Verification in itself therefore cannot provide the ultimate test for the fixation of belief, which is always open for possible contestation.

Another important difference with the traditional positivist model of scientific enquiry is the role that the community of enquirers plays in fixing beliefs and in re-establishing commonsense (Struan 2006). For Peirce, the creation of habit across persons and communities is what is distinctive about this exercise. “The real is the idea in which the community ultimately settles down” (CP 6.610). The reason is that scientific inquiry is a quintessentially social practice. “Unless we make ourselves hermits, we shall necessarily influence each other’s opinions; so that the problem becomes how to fix belief, not in the individual merely, but in the community” (CP 5.378)<sup>10</sup>. This ‘communal’ epistemological standpoint, however, does not imply that consensus within a community is prerequisite to define what reality is. For Peirce, the way we understand the world around us is shaped by the ongoing debate we conduct with other individuals, and it is through this discussion that in the long run we might be able to better grasp what is ‘real’ (Coppock 2007).

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<sup>9</sup> There are two types of experiment: ‘real’ (entities manipulated are objects and processes of the perceptible world) and ‘ideal’ (human constructions, counterfactuals). Both are exposed to errors, and can be corrected through repeated trials.

<sup>10</sup> The social dimension of truth claims clearly contrasts with William James’ conceptualization of the ‘will to believe’, which implied that we could construct a reality non-socially and in the short run (Wiley, 2006:44).

### **Peirce meets international relations: pragmatism's social and political dimensions**

The central claim advanced in this paper is that the Peircean conception of inquiry is applicable to the social realm, and, in particular, to international relations. Such move is not uncontroversial. Peirce himself was sceptic about the utility of exporting his ideas out of the natural sciences. For him, science and everyday life are characterized by two distinct methods of inquiry: the former is based on formal deliberative reasoning, while the latter on instinctual reasoning habits<sup>11</sup>. Another problematic aspect in the relation between science and everyday life is that for Peirce 'truth' obtained through the scientific method can only be established in the long run within an ever expanding community of inquirers. Issues and problems in social practices and institutions, however, generally require interpretations in a limited time frame and localized context (Rochberg-Halton, 1986:14)<sup>12</sup>. Furthermore, the object of inquiry in science and everyday life seems to be made of ontological different 'material'. The main components of the social domain are not natural entities such as the diamonds Peirce refers to in his analysis of pragmatism, but human practices and institutions that are constituted by self-reflective individuals, and that might change as a result of the activities and interpretations of those involved in their creation.

Yet if we look more closely at Peirce's conception of the logic of inquiry, and link it to other elements in his critical commonsensism, the application of his ideas to everyday life seems not as far fetched as it might appear at first sight. First of all, Peirce himself is ambivalent on this point. Despite claiming that scientific inquiry is a sui generis domain, he did consider (albeit in passim) the possibility of extending his model to non-scientific communities such as the religious and the legal (Parker, 2001). The irritation of doubt that may give rise to science can, after all, arise in other areas of human experience. Any group that encounters doubt and sets out to address it with a scientific method would be a scientific community. It is in this 'analogical' sense that we can talk about the application of Peirce's insights to the social realm.

In order to make the analogy stick, however, it is necessary to foreground the 'sociological' elements underpinning Peirce's thought. The first, and more explicit, of these elements is related to the communal dimension of the Peircean conception of scientific inquiry. As noted earlier, for Peirce inquiry is not an

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<sup>11</sup> Using medieval scholastic terms, Peirce refers to the two types of reasoning as 'logica docens' and 'logica utens'. The term "*utens*" derives from the Latin word "*uti*," which means *to use*.

<sup>12</sup> The apparent lack of an immediate practical application of Peircean ideas is one of the main differences with other pragmatist authors such as James and Dewey. In James' radical empiricism truth is what works in concrete instances; for Dewey truth is localized in specific situations of inquiry. This emphasis on the practical dimension of inquiry can explain why their insights, unlike Peirce's, have been more widely applied to study social phenomena.

individualistic and abstract endeavour, but a collective activity involving the interaction and communication of a community of inquirers whose goal is to make sense of the reality surrounding them. Conceptualized in this fashion, inquiry is an interpretative tool that humans rely on to collectively give meaning to their lives. As a human construction constituted through interpretation, the reality that Peirce talks about is a cultural system, and as mechanism aimed at re-establishing this reality, inquiry itself is a cultural tool<sup>13</sup>. This cultural system is constituted by the existing, mostly unconscious and taken for granted experience we possess. The beliefs constituting commonsense “rest on...the total everyday experience of many generations of multitudinous populations” (CP 5.522). Even the instinctual dimension of abduction depends on previous experience. Unlike intuition, instinct must be mediated by its context. “(A)n instinct, in a proper sense of the word, is an inherited habit, or in more accurate language, an inherited disposition” (CP 2.170). Friedrichs and Kratochwil talk about inquiry’s communal and experiential dimensions as key components of a Peircean-inspired pragmatist methodology in IR (2009: 706). These dimensions, however, can also play a part in studying the everyday working of international politics. I will return to this point below, when I address pragmatism’s political aspects.

One of the upshots of the argument about the mediated nature of logical reasoning is that inquiry is not a completely conscious activity. The unconscious aspect of inquiry is not limited to its preliminary and final stages, when commonsense reigns. It is also present in the abductive moment of inquiry. The principle “that we often derive from observation strong intimations of truth, without being able to specify what were the circumstances we had observed which conveyed those intimations.” (CP 7.46) means that abduction is a ‘guessing with non-conscious clues’ (Paavola, 2005: 14)<sup>14</sup>

The unreflective dimension of inquiry is not the only non-cognitive element in Peirce’s analysis of scientific inquiry. As it is the case for practical reasoning, emotion plays an important part in this activity. For Savan, Peirce’s logic of inquiry is at the core an ‘affective theory of doubt and belief’ (Savan,

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<sup>13</sup> Since life becomes meaningful through interpretation and communication within a community of inquirers, the logic of inquiry can be considered as a type of semiotic activity, a view that Peirce himself contemplated. On the semiotic dimension of logic in Peirce’s thought, see Fisch, 1986. The idea of inquiry as semiotic activity echoes the conceptualization of culture a system of signs as developed by the anthropologist Clifford Geertz (Geertz, 1973). Unlike Peirce’s reliance on experience, however, Geertz stresses the a-priori acceptance of authority as basis for validity of cultural beliefs and thus ultimately maintains a conceptualist framework that restricts the scope of cultural signification and belief (Rochberg-Halton, 1986: 118).

<sup>14</sup> In this formulation of abduction there are parallels with the Bourdieusian notion of ‘habitus’ as the set of background dispositions and expectations guiding social actors in their everyday life (Bourdieu 1990:66-67). On the application of Bourdieu’s ideas to IR, see Pouliot 2010; Williams 2007.

1981: 327). Doubt, the instigator of inquiry and that “uneasy and dissatisfied state from which we struggle to free ourselves” (CP 5.372), is first felt rather than known; a situational feeling of doubt then becomes known, and at this point the inquirer understands that there is a problem requiring inquiry. Peirce does not claim that emotion and cognition are distinct kinds of experiences, but rather elements that pervade all experiences (Hausman 1997). Peirce’s discussion of the nexus between feelings and reasoning is thus consistent with works in the social sciences (including IR) that have challenged the intellectualistic and disembodied (and thus emotion-less) nature of mainstream rationalist understandings of society and its dynamics (Clough 2007; for IR, see Crawford 2000)

The argument that scientific inquiry does not deal with issues of ‘practical importance’ can be countered if we consider a broader sense of the term ‘practical’. The establishment of new belief is the goal of inquiry. But this does not entail the mere acquisition of abstract knowledge. A genuine belief is “something on which a man is prepared to act” (CP 2.148). In this sense, opinion is a habit, or the disposition to act in certain ways under certain conditions. Inquiry is thus ultimately a phenomenon of habit-taking. We learn about the world not simply by forming ideas in response to stimuli, but by forming habits of responding to the world. The world is something whose processual character we can embody, and that we imitate, in the way we act. It is in this sense that inquiry can perform a practical role in everyday life. As the literature on habit-taking in IR as shown, this is also the case for world politics, when policy-makers or other non-state actors try to make sense of the reality surrounding them and act upon it (Hopf 2010; Brown 2012).

So far, I have tried to foreground the sociological dimension of Peirce’s logic of inquiry to justify its application to the social realm. But what about the political realm, the subject matter under scrutiny here? On one hand, we could argue that this move is warranted since politics (including international politics) is a type of social process, hence the discussion in the previous paragraphs applies to this realm as well. On the other, the specificity of the political in Peirce’s work should be addressed to make the transition more plausible. While Peirce gives us few hints on this question, for some commentators there is an undercurrent of political thought running through of his work (Anderson, 1997; Tarr, 1981; Ward, 2001; Talisse, 2004). According to Anderson it is the social dimension of the fixation of belief (the fact that it is accomplished within a community) that casts it as a political issue. In asking how a community should govern the processes and contexts of fixing its beliefs, we ask not only about a specific kind of political action, but also about how we might envision the constituency of a healthy community (Anderson, 1997: 224). A political dimension is also evident in Peirce’s insights about what we could call the ‘political economy of research’. Peirce understood that science is a human and social enterprise that operates in

some given historical, social, and economic context. Since their economic resources are always scarce, inquirers must decide what problems are crucial and paramount and must be addressed immediately, and what problems instead can be taken into consideration a later date. Just like policy-makers, in their activities inquirers thus need to make difficult decisions under pressure, and to take into account contending – sometimes even clashing – demands.

Besides the specific political elements in Peirce's thought, there are also elements in politics (as opposed to other social domains) that correspond to his vision of inquiry. First of all, politics, like science, is a collective and public enterprise that takes place within (and between) communities of policy-makers and other political actors. As Adler (2008) has shown, these 'communities of practice' are commonplace also at the international level. Secondly, politics is practically oriented since it aims at solving concrete problems, be it a political crisis or a particularly difficult diplomatic negotiation. This is particularly the case with world affairs. If compared with domestic politics, political interactions in the global arena tend to be more technocratic and problem-solving oriented, with lower standards of democratic accountability (Keohane and Grant 2005). Thirdly, as Bourdieusean IR scholars have noted, the logic followed by the actors involved in the political arena is typically characterized by a mix of rationality and instinct, and in their practices they often rely on information of which they are not completely conscious (Pouliot 2010, Williams 2007). At the same time, politics is more regulated and controlled than everyday life, and policy-makers often have to reflect on their activities to make a sound decision or learn from past experiences.

The correspondences between, on one hand, Peirce's ideas and, on the other, the social and political realms suggest that a pragmatist logic of enquiry can be fruitfully deployed to study international political phenomena. In the next section, I outline how a Peirce-inspired analytical model of radical policy change looks like, and, using my own work on the European Union as term of reference, I illustrate how this model can be applied to an empirical case study in world politics.

### **Pragmatism and international relations: an empirical application**

As policy analysts have observed, policy-making is as much about planning and implementation as it is about persuasion (Forester and Fischer 1993; Majone 1989). This is true in the everyday administration of a polity, but even more so in times of 'revolutionary' change in international affairs (Crawford 2002; Risse 2000). When introducing radically new policy initiatives, policy-makers are under pressure to provide their colleagues and the public with some plausible reasons to justify the unconventional course of action they are embarking on. Yet formulating these reasons is a daunting task. Commonsense defines the terms of reference and limits of what is acceptable in a given community at any given

time. In a commonsensical situation: “[t]he reality of everyday life is taken for granted as reality. It does not require additional verification over and beyond its simple presence. It is simply there, as self-evident and compelling facticity” (Berger, P. L. & Luckmann 1967: 23). If the assumptions underlying a new initiative lie outside the boundaries of the present commonsense, any attempt to justify such a move using the existing standards becomes *ipso facto* absurd. The initiative’s proponents simply lack the proper vocabulary, and they are precluded from relying by way of resemblance to other already accepted normative frameworks<sup>15</sup>. How can policy-makers overcome this dilemma and successfully carry out the new policy initiative they have envisioned?

A model of policy change based on Peirce’s logic of inquiry offers a way out of this puzzle. Policy-makers facing a ‘leap into the dark’ situation can in fact be equated to a community of inquirers trying to re-establish the commonsensical understanding of the world that the emergence of doubt might have shattered. In this scenario, a pragmatist model of policy change would be structured around three interrelated hypotheses, each representing a distinct stage in the policy-making process. The first hypothesis (‘irritation of doubt’) refers to the conditions under which a revolutionary policy process might be set in motion; the second hypothesis (‘abduction’) defines the conditions under which a new policy initiative might be pursued; the third, and final, hypothesis (‘fixation of belief’) outlines the conditions leading to the adoption and eventual institutionalization of the new policy initiative. The content of the three hypotheses would look as follow:

- *Hypothesis 1 (‘irritation of doubt’)*

*When an established policy approach can no longer provide satisfactory solutions to the challenges affecting a particular policy field, members of a policy community feel a greater urgency to question the approach’s underlying assumptions and to explore alternative policy options that can address existing challenges in a more effective way.*

- *Hypothesis 2 (‘abduction’)*

*Members of a policy community will consider pursuing new policy initiatives whose assumptions lie outside the existing commonsense if, using as term of reference their shared practical experience, they can articulate a supporting argument whose premises, if they were accurate, would justify*

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<sup>15</sup> On this point, see Keck and Sikkink 1998: 204; Payne 1998: 38.

*the unconventional course of action that the community is planning to undertake.*

- *Hypothesis 3 ('fixation of belief')*

*Members of a policy community agree to adopt an unconventional policy initiative pursued through an abductive process if the initiative, after being put to the test, meets the expectations for its original pursuit and demonstrates to be effective in addressing relevant challenges affecting a policy field.*

In my work I have explored the potential of a Peircean model of policy change to study international organizations, and, in particular, the European Union (Zaiotti 2007, 2011)<sup>16</sup>. The EU is a relevant case because its creation and evolution represent a challenge to the traditional 'commonsensical' state-centric view of international relations<sup>17</sup>. Debates on, as well as practices of, European governance also seem to reflect a 'pragmatist attitude' in international relations (Albert and Kopp-Malek, 2002). With the lost legitimacy of the fixed delimitations of the Westphalian frame, the quest for a European common political space serves the pragmatic purpose of providing a horizon for meaning and its understanding. This hermeneutical horizon "can never be reached or transcended, but always expands to determine and be determined by every new operation of understanding." (Albert and Kopp-Malek 2002: 456). Besides these pragmatist elements highlighted by Albert and Kopp-Malek, the European Union project presents also some more specifically Peircean features. As the term 'project' suggests, the formulation and then progressive implementation of the EU involves a mix of rationality and intuition, technocracy and creativity on the part of its 'creators'.

It is on these theoretical premises that I have based my analysis of one of the most remarkable policy shifts in the European project's recent history, namely the emergence in the 1980s of a new regional approach to border control in Europe (hereafter 'Schengen', from the name of the institutional arrangement that made this development possible). This event is remarkable because, in adopting this new policy regime, European policy-makers (both at national and EU levels) have challenged what until recently had been the commonsensical nationalist way of thinking about border control across the continent. But how did European

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<sup>16</sup> On the application of pragmatism to international organizations, see Haas and Haas 2002. Friedrichs (2008) has employed the Peircean concept of abduction to study international police cooperation in Europe (Friedrichs 2008). This work, however, treats abduction as a methodological tool to be used by the researcher rather than a middle range theory to address specific empirical questions.

<sup>17</sup> On the European experiment and its theoretical implications see Pollack 2005.

policy-makers justify the controversial decision to pursue the new regime? How was the transition from the existing nationalist commonsense to the new post-national one possible? And how was the new commonsense established?

The most prominent accounts of Schengen's evolution have relied on the theoretical insights of what in EU studies are known as rationalist and intergovernmental approaches (Gehring 1998; Moravcsik 1993: 359-360; on rationalist and intergovernmental approaches in EU studies, see Dowding 2002) and constructivism (Wiener 1999; Bigo 2003; on constructivism in EU studies, see Christiansen, Jorgensen, and Wiener 2001). Both approaches, however, have serious limits in addressing the puzzle that defines this policy regime's emergence. The main limit of works adopting a rationalist approach is their 'business as usual attitude' towards the issue of policy change. Border control is treated as any other policy fields in the European Union, and consideration is taken of its unique features and subject matter (national security) and the epochal nature of the transformation that the Schengen regime has brought about. The main problem with a constructivist account, on the other hand, has to do with the mechanism leading to a policy shift. The explanation for this development tends to emphasise either functional factors (e.g. the EU as the ideal institutional context for the emergence of new post-national norms) or structural ones (e.g., Gestalt-like switches in ideas and practices), with a little or underspecified role for agency in making change possible.

With a view to find a plausible alternative to rationalist and constructivist approaches to the study of Schengen and its emergence, the following sections outline a pragmatist argument based on the model of policy change outlined above. The story of Schengen is thus reconstructed according to the model's main tenets: from the appearance of a problematic situation that questions the existing commonsense (reflected in the growing challenges to the nationalist approach to border control in Europe in the 1980s), to the 'irritation of doubt' that this situation triggers within a relevant community of inquirers (here European policy-makers), to the formulation by members of this community of possible solutions to the problematic situation (the outlining of alternative post-national models of border control in Europe), to the practical experimentation of these suggested solutions (the trials of alternative models of border control carried out through new policy initiatives), and, finally, to the debate within the community over the results of these practical experiments (which, in the case of border control in Europe, ultimately led to the decision to accept Schengen as new official approach to border control in the region).

*Border control in Europe and the 'irritation of doubt': the challenges to Westphalia and the search for alternative models*

The nationalist conception of borders has a long pedigree in Europe, dating back to the formative years of the state-system in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. It is only after the Second World War however, that European states gained full “control of the means of movement” (Torpey 1998) across their territories. Arguably, even at its peak, a Westphalian model of border control contained internal contradictions. These dissonant elements, however, did not seriously threaten the foundations of the Westphalian edifice. In this period, national governments were still fully in charge of border control, borders were heavily guarded, and regional cooperation on this issue remained limited.

A decisive challenge to a nationalist model of border control occurred only at the beginning of the 1980s. This was the result of the convergence of a series of developments. Some were global, such as the growth of economic and other types of flows (including population movements); others more specifically (Western) European, such as economic stagnation and high unemployment, terrorism, and the ‘Euro-sclerosis’ that had paralyzed the European Communities since the 1970s. These developments put borders, which were relatively ‘invisible’ during the previous decades, back at centre stage in policy debates across the region. They generated a sense of urgency for decision-makers to respond to the new challenges, but also pointed in contradictory directions. On one hand, they created pressure for more openness of borders, while, on the other, they called for more restrictions. The result was a growing tension between the economic and the security realms, and a questioning of the capacity of governments to find an effective trade-off between them. In the same way that anomalies in a scientific field foreground the shortcomings of accepted theories and ‘irritate’ scientists, these trends highlighted the inadequateness of national approaches to deal with the complexity of border control and spurred European decision-makers to find viable alternatives to the existing nation-based approaches. It is in this charged atmosphere that in the second part of the 1980s European policy-makers decided to launch two initiatives (‘Schengen’ and ‘Brussels’<sup>18</sup>), each one representing an alternative to the then dominant national approach to border control.

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<sup>18</sup> The use of these geographical terms is meant to be evocative of the features of each initiative. Schengen is the location where the regime’s founding text was signed (the 1985 Schengen agreement). Brussels is the official ‘capital’ of Europe, and as such represents the very essence of the project of European integration, which, among other things, entails a particular conception of borders.

*The abductive moment: the pursuit of 'Schengen' and 'Brussels' as alternative models of border control*

The Schengen and Brussels initiatives were regional (both in terms of the source of political impetus and geographical scope), and their common objective was the abolition of controls at European internal borders. They differed, however, in terms of underlying assumptions behind their governance model (most notably, Brussels relied on the EU - then European Community – as main institutional term of reference, while Schengen used an intergovernmental arrangement). At the same time, both represented distinct policy projects whose assumptions clashed with those of the existing nationalist approach to border control in the region. How was then their pursuit possible?

In order to justify their post-national projects, the Schengen and Brussels initiatives' proponents turned to the model that they felt best incarnated the ideal of regional integration, namely the European Community. To be plausible, the reference to the Community was formulated in a way that rendered it consistent with each initiative's specific characteristics. For Brussels, a regional model based on the European Community was presented as the 'natural' setting where to pursue a new post-national approach to border control. Since it had worked in the economic and social realms, the reliance on the Community's institutional framework was deemed as a reasonable choice also for projects of *political* integration, as in the case of border control. The 'EC as natural setting' thus became the official justification to pursue the initiative further. It allowed participants to overcome—at least temporarily—the politically contentious issue of the interpretation of what the abolition of borders meant (i.e. whether it entailed all individuals or just EC citizens; more on this point *infra*).

With regards to Schengen, the case for a post-national border regime was complicated by the initiative's intergovernmental roots. Schengen shared with its EC counterpart the declared objective of abolishing border controls across Europe. In pursuing this goal, however, Schengen's proponents had to demonstrate that the intergovernmental approach they were employing was compatible with the European integration project. Their initiative was in fact clearly at odds with the long established practice among European states of working together under a common institutional umbrella, and it could have led to the creation of a Europe of 'variable geometry', with some members 'in' and others 'out'. In order to justify the leap into the dark that the project entailed, Schengen's proponents argued that the initiative represented a 'laboratory for Europe'. Schengen, they argued, would provide a pragmatic and effective approach to border control, and give an important contribution to European integration.

In both the Schengen and Brussels frameworks, members of the border community therefore justified their pursuit by abductively referring to the

potential effectiveness of the new approaches to border control envisaged in each initiative and their linkage with the EC project. These pragmatic(ist) moves helped members of the community to undertake activities that they would have not considered in normal circumstances. They cannot, however, explain why one initiative was eventually selected and the other discarded. It is to this question that I now turn.

*Testing the new approaches to border control: Schengen vs. Brussels*

The 1990s was a decade of feverish activities in Europe's border control domain. Whether in the European Union or in the context of the Schengen initiative, the policy-makers constituting Europe's border control community engaged in prolonged and heated debates about the conditions for the creation a 'Europe without frontiers', proposed new rules and measures aimed at abolishing internal border checks and at reinforcing Europe's external frontiers, supervised over the implementation of these proposals, negotiated the entry of new members in the regime, and expanded the relations with third countries beyond Europe. Read through pragmatist lenses, these practices functioned as testing grounds for the two new policy models that European policy-makers had envisioned and pursued in the previous years. The outcome of these tests was shaped by the new models' performance in addressing relevant problems in the border control domain. Schengen's successful implementation persuaded recalcitrant members of Europe's border control community to endorse it, allowing for consensus within the community to be reached. Conversely, the lack of progress in the implementation in the EU context meant that no strong argument to overcome existing opposition could be mustered, thus contributing to the initiative's demise.

Due to space constraints, the next paragraphs will only address two cases (one from each initiative) that are representative of the way in which in each forum European policy-makers assessed the Schengen and Brussels initiatives' performance when put to the test. With regards to Schengen, the issue of the 'necessary conditions' for the application of the new border control regime is examined, while in the case of Brussels, the debate over the interpretation of the meaning of 'free movement' as encapsulated in Article 8a of the *Single European Act* is taken into consideration.

*Testing Schengen: the debate over the 'preliminary conditions'*

By September 1, 1992, all Schengen members had ratified the Schengen Implementation Convention, and thus on that date the agreement officially entered into force. In practice, however, this implied only the establishment of an Executive Committee ('COMEX'), which had to evaluate whether all the

preliminary conditions to implement the Convention were met<sup>19</sup>. Among Schengen members, however, disagreement over the steps that had to be taken in order to meet these conditions soon began to emerge. The diplomatic bickering that ensued represented the first major test of the new border control regime.

The French delegation was the most vocal in expressing its concerns, blaming its partners for lack of political will and laxness at the borders. In the spring of 1993 Paris announced that it was not ready to go along with its Schengen partners and abolish internal border controls as programmed. Despite the French skepticism, in the following months concrete steps towards meeting the criteria were achieved: Schengen members drafted a border manual and common consular instructions, harmonized visa issuance, reached an agreement on asylum processing, and introduced a new circulation regime at airports. In light of these developments, the French delegates reconsidered their position, and, at the COMEX meeting of June 1993, accepted to fully participate in the implementation of the regime. The participants, “in order to reinforce the credibility of the Schengen model and to give the long waited positive signal”<sup>20</sup> agreed on a common text, indicating the end of the year as the target by which to apply the Convention, but also stressing the need for the ‘extra efforts’ necessary in areas such drug policy, external border controls and data sharing. Technical problems with one of the agreement's main pillars, the common police computer-system SIS, meant that the date had to be postponed yet again. The issue was solved in the fall of 1994. As a result, the Schengen Executive Committee was able to reach an agreement on a date (March 26, 1995) for the entry into force of the Convention.

In the first meeting after the Schengen Implementation Convention had become fully operational (April 1995), all delegations were satisfied with the working of the system. Following concerns over the right of asylum, drugs, and modalities of border crossing, France requested a probation period. Other delegations, however, denied this request, claiming that it would go against the “spirit of Schengen”. In response, France declared that it would maintain controls over land borders with Belgium and Luxembourg as long as it deemed necessary.

In the months that followed the abolition of checks at most national frontiers, no major security breach had occurred and the system of pooled border

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<sup>19</sup> The seven conditions were the tightening of external border controls; uniform visa deliverance; streamlining of asylum claims; realization of the Schengen Information System or ‘SIS’ (a common database system used for the purpose of maintaining and distributing information related to border security and law enforcement); respect for the provisions of existing drug conventions; legal protection of personal data; the creation of a circulation regime in airports.

<sup>20</sup> This excerpt, as other references in this section, is extrapolated from the COMEX meetings’ official minutes.

management was functioning smoothly. These positive results persuaded other countries to join the regime. In 1995, Sweden, Denmark, Norway and Iceland became Schengen members. Its enlargement proved that the regime, despite its intergovernmental origins, could indeed function as laboratory for the EU, and not only in terms of policy integration, but also with regards to the stated objective of extending its influence beyond its current members. (It should be noted that, at the time, two of the new Schengen countries - Norway and Iceland - were not part of the EU).

Faced with mounting evidence of the regime's success, the French delegation started to soften its nationalist stance. Despite the claims to the contrary, in this period France *de facto* applied the regime at its Belgian and Luxembourg borders. While the policing of the drug trafficking route to and from the Netherlands continued, no systematic checks were performed along these frontiers. Albeit reluctantly, France therefore eventually accepted the Schengen's 'spirit' when sitting at the Schengen Executive Committee's table and in the everyday practices at the border. It was with this newly achieved consensus that Schengen members could start the debate over the regime's formal incorporation in the European Union (more on this point *infra*).

#### *Testing Brussels: 'Europe without frontiers' and the meaning of freedom of movement*

The ongoing testing of new approaches to border control taking place in Europe throughout the 1990s was not restricted to the intergovernmental practices of the Schengen initiative. Similar evolutionary dynamics were evident in the European Community's (soon to be 'Union') context. Indeed, after the signing of the *Single European Act* in 1986, an intense debate ensued over the project of a 'Europe without frontiers'. Despite the differences of opinion over the link between the achievement of the goal of the Common Market and the abolition of internal borders, the European Commission and the representatives of EC member states agreed to begin negotiations in the European Community framework. On these bases, in the summer of 1989 members of the Ad Hoc Group Immigration (the group responsible for issues of border control and immigration within the EC) started discussing the text of an agreement on a European-wide common policy regarding border control (the "Border Control Convention"). This debate represented the first real test of the proposed EC-based border regime. Right from the beginning, however, negotiations over the Border Convention encountered serious problems. The most contentious issue was the meaning of 'borders' for the purpose of the convention and the implications that their abolition would have had for member states. In the first rounds of negotiations, two camps emerged. On one hand, a group of 'historical' Community members, supported by the Commission, defended a broad interpretation of the Single European Act's Article

8a (i.e. the meaning of free movement in the EC). The article established the goal of 'progressively establishing the internal market', defined as an 'area without borders'. According to this group, since the area was equated to an internal (i.e. domestic) market, the abolition of borders should apply to both EC and non-EC citizens. On the other hand, a group of recalcitrant delegations led by the United Kingdom (the other members were Ireland, Denmark and Greece) took a 'restrictive' approach to Article 8a. These countries claimed that the goal of the Internal Market could be achieved through simple intergovernmental cooperation, and therefore supra-national approaches (i.e. through the Community) were not necessary.

While the negotiations over the Borders Convention stalled, the European Commission became more vocal in its attempt to convince member states to meet the January 1993 deadline for the complete abolition of border controls. Failing to provide concrete evidence of the effectiveness of the new border model, in the following months the Commission turned to a more conciliatory approach, and proposed a pragmatic solution in view of the impending deadline. After meeting with the British Home Secretary, Martin Bangemann, Vice-President of the European Commission responsible for internal border controls, suggested a one-line resolution calling for 'no systematic border controls' after 1 January 1993. The idea, widely reported in the press as the 'Bangemann wave', entailed that EC nationals entering the UK would not be subject to thorough checks, but walk through passport control holding up their passports or national identity cards and showing it to the British authorities.

The solution proposed by the Commission was not enough, however, to convince the United Kingdom. It had been assumed that the compromise discussed between Home Secretary and the Commission's Vice President would apply to all entry to the UK by EC nationals. The British government argued instead that the 'Bangemann wave' was applicable only to seaports and not airports—the point through which most people entered the country. The British government thus maintained its commitment to keep controls at its borders 'indefinitely'.

Because of the British delegation's position, and a general lack of political will from other EC members, negotiations within the Community's framework did not advance in the years that followed. Hence, although the Borders Convention remained on the agenda, no substantial progress was made. Not even the establishment in 1993 of a Justice and Home Affairs domain within the EC (now 'EU') and the ambitious program it entailed helped revamp the process. The failure of the Brussels initiative became official in 1999 when the Treaty of Amsterdam entered into force and the Schengen regime and its *acquis* were formally incorporated into the European Union framework, thus displacing the work carried out in that forum until that moment.

*The fixation of belief, or why Schengen became the official model of border control in Europe*

How do we make sense of the developments characterizing the two initiatives? Why was Schengen successful, while Brussels failed? According to a pragmatist reading of these events, the answer to these questions lies in the two models' performance, that is, the practical results they obtained when members of the policy community instantiated their underlying assumptions in the course of the negotiations that took place in Europe throughout the 1990s. On this account, Schengen fared better than Brussels. What defined Schengen's superior performance was that its formula balancing the apparently contradictory requirements of freedom and security demonstrated to be more effective in addressing relevant practical and political problems that European policy-makers had to face in this period. Positive results (e.g. the regime's entry into effect, the expansion to new members) created political momentum for following rounds of negotiations, and diplomatic successes were in turn translated into new policy initiatives. This did not occur in the EU context. Successes were circumscribed and they had a limited impact on the establishment of the regime. As a result, the pursuit of a EU-based border control regime progressively lost momentum and ultimately stalled.

It is therefore thanks to the new initiatives' practical results over time that members of Europe's border control policy community were put in position to formally embrace Schengen as new approach to border control and to discard the work done in the EU. With the entry into force of the Treaty of Amsterdam in 1999, Schengen was formally incorporated in the EU institutional framework, thus becoming the official approach to border control in Europe. What only a few years before was considered unthinkable, became reality. The 'fixation' of Schengen as the new commonsensical model to manage Europe's borders had successfully taken place. As Peirce would warn, however, even a settled belief is open to contestation. Schengen is no exception to this rule. Over time, its underlying assumptions might be questioned (e.g. the regime's emphasis on security over citizens' rights), leading to the emergence of a new 'irritation of doubt', which, in turn, could push European policy-makers into undertaking a new 'leap into the dark', and, with it, the quest for fixing a 'post-Schengen' belief about border control.

**Conclusion: pragmatist politics and the politics of pragmatism**

The recent pragmatist turn in IR has injected new life in current debates within the discipline and enriched its theoretical scope. It is in this spirit of creative engagement that in this paper I have assessed the contribution that a Peircean approach to the study of world politics can offer. Although originally formulated

for the hard sciences, some of Peirce's ideas and themes are relevant for this field of inquiry. This is especially the case for the pragmatist conceptualization of the logic of inquiry based on abductive reasoning and empirical validation. The added value of Peirce's insights is that they offer a promising common framework in which both rationalist and sociological, and normative and empirical approaches in IR can start a fruitful dialogue.<sup>21</sup>

Any attempt to graft Peircean ideas from the natural sciences to world politics should be undertaken with caution. The most challenging aspect of this exercise lies in the fact that a crucial element characterizing international political phenomena seems to be missing in a pragmatist model. This aspect is power. Issues such as the authority and standing of the participants involved in an inquiry, and how they interact and influence each other in their quest to fix new beliefs are not fully explored by Peirce. This apparently depoliticized view of the logic of inquiry is definitely a big hurdle in rendering it useful to examining political dynamics in the international arena. It should be noted, however, that Peircean ideas—albeit indirectly—do have political implications that touch upon the issue of power. This suggestion is based on a critical reading of Peirce's treatment of the logic of inquiry as a system to interpret reality. At any given time, reality (be it material or social) is not unproblematically given to human beings; instead, it is the result of the debate within a relevant community of inquirers. This debate can be very conflictual, and it might never be completely settled. The 'struggle to fix belief' thus resembles that which occurs in the political arena, where policy-makers wrestle with each other to impose their own political view. This battle is not decided solely by the material capabilities owned by an individual or group (though these capabilities can help, in the same way that a scientist with strong financial and institutional backing might have an advantage over his/her 'poorer' colleagues). The fixing of belief will be shaped by the concrete results obtained by a given proposal, which members of the community can bring to the negotiating table to back up the reality they are envisaging. The examples mentioned in this essay, i.e. those involving international organizations, have showed that politics permeates even what seem purely technocratic projects. Indeed, from a pragmatist perspective, the very idea of a 'project' cannot be treated in isolation from the political dynamics that have rendered such endeavour

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<sup>21</sup> On the theory-practice debate in IR, see Erskine (2012), Snyder and Vinjamuri (2012). For some authors, Peirce is a sui generis postmodern author, and as such his ideas could be used to expand even further this conversation. According to Ochs, the postmodern themes in Peirce are the critical character of his forward thinking, reflexivity, the performative nature of his thinking which embodied its purpose in the way it actually responded to the discomforts of modernity, the role of antecedent practices and commonsense in today's world, his fallibilism, and the central role of creativity and imagination in human practices (Ochs, 1993:58-60).

possible. And if this is true for the scientific field, *a fortiori* it should be the case for more 'social' domains such as world politics.

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