

ENTREVISTA

Jim Garrison

Dos três grandes nomes do pragmatismo americano, Charles Peirce (1839-1914), John Dewey (1859-1952) e William James (1898-1944), a Biblioteconomia e Ciência da Informação vem tendo familiaridade há mais tempo com James, através do livro sobre as bibliotecas e a organização do conhecimento, de Jesse Shera - *Libraries and organization of libraries* de 1965. Mas Charles Peirce tem recebido maior atenção dos cientistas da informação brasileiros, ultimamente, talvez porque a questão dos signos esteja mais diretamente relacionada com o registro e a recuperação da a informação, ela mesma entendida como signo documentário. John Dewey é o filósofo mais conhecido do campo educacional e não seria descabido dizer que William James é um autor bastante estudado na área de psicologia. Dewey passou a integrar a área informacional através dos trabalhos de Birger Hjørland em várias oportunidades sendo a mais conhecida, a sua noção de domínio; o universo do conhecimento abrangeria diversos domínios, de acordo com a idéia deweyniana do pluralismo na constituição do social. Se tivéssemos que definir o pragmatismo americano de maneira rápida, diríamos que a experiência está na base das teorizações praticadas pelos três filósofos, embora cada um terá sua maneira própria de entender a experiência. O professor Jim Garrison (Virginia Polytechnic Institute/Blacksburg – EUA) esteve no campus da USP de Ribeirão Preto entre os dias 2 a 6 de agosto deste ano, a convite do Grupo de Pesquisa Retórica e Argumentação na Pedagogia, coordenado pelo professor Marcus Vinicius da Cunha, docente do Departamento de Psicologia e Educação da FFCLRP-USP. Jim Garrison é um dos mais destacados pensadores de Filosofia e da Filosofia da Educação da atualidade. Agradecemos ao professor Marcos Vinicius da Cunha, a gentileza de colocar a InCID: Revista de Ciência da Informação e Documentação em contato com o prof. Garrison.

InCID: Prof. Garrison, we are an information science course here at USP-Ribeirão, with a subfield called Knowledge Organization, where documentary languages like thesaurus or bibliographic classification codes are artifacts built according to user's interests. Could you say something about knowledge organization in the context of deweyan pragmatism, especially his concept of interest?

Jim Garrison: Perhaps it is best to begin by noting that Dewey uses the term “intellectualism” as an indictment of the idea that all experiencing is a mode of knowing or that all experience can be reduced to cognition. Our primary relation to reality is not a

cognitive, knowing relation. For Dewey, knowledge only mediates experience. He distinguishes it carefully from immediate, qualitative experience. Qualitative experience will always have cognitive, semiotic content for a linguistic being. However, as an immediate experience, it is purely qualitative. Consummatory aesthetic experience is a good example. Such experience occurs as the consummation of artistic work, but in and of itself it is simply a matter of immediate aesthetic pleasure. Of course, there is an infinite number of other possible immediate, unreflective, qualitative experiences such as the sexual, the sublime, the tragic, the comic, and so on. In the moment, all we can say of such experience is Ahh! or Ohh! or Uck! and such.

For Dewey, even cognitive experiences have emotional and imaginative characteristics because for him, all reasoning is practical means-ends reasoning where knowledge, indeed all namable objects, are the objectives of inquiry. Practical reasoning is reasoning conducted to secure ends we desire. Inquiry begins in an uncoordinated, disrupted, situation and terminates when we can coordinate the situation, relieve the doubt, and continue onward. Dewey insists a situation is a situation for an inquirer only because they participate in it. Said differently, inquiry originates in needs and desires that lead us to have an interest in some situation and objects comprising it, or the creation of objects we can use to resolve it. The situation does not become a cognitive problem until we can name it.

When we act, we express the present self, but we form the future self. That is why. Dewey insists that in any inquiry what is most at stake is the identity of the inquirer participating in the situation. This is the key to understanding motivation. We never have to motivate a living creature to act; they act by virtue of being alive. Motivation is only a question of what objects control our actions. For Dewey, interests form the core of the self and supply the principles of our conduct. They also signify the objects whether perceived or conceived that control our action. Interests mediate between the self and the objects that control our conduct real, imagined, our sought for in inquiry.

Now think about someone with an interest in some domain of inquiry, or some situation she or he cannot even name, entering a library. It might be best for libraries to organize knowledge as a decentered hypertext where anything can connect to anything and allow the patron to simply follow the logic of their interests. However, a competent librarian can ask useful questions that narrow the hypertext possibilities and helps intelligently organize inquiry. For Dewey, all meanings are social meanings, so the negotiation of meaning between the patron and information professional becomes critical. Dewey maintains that to share a meaning is to come to agreement in action. The task of the patron and information specialist is

to come to such agreement. They form a temporary community of shared inquiry. There is no correct organization of knowledge prior to a given inquiry. Proper organization emerges in the process of inquiry and is not complete until the inquiry concludes for a participant in a situation.

InCID: Librarianship and Information Science works with the idea of ‘representation’ in that the bibliographic references of a text is a sign, it is in place of the text and therefore it is an icon, similar to the text because it contains text elements, such as author, title, summary. Does such metaphysics of presence have something to learn with philosophies of difference?

Jim Garrison: Signs for Dewey, like Charles Sanders Peirce from whom he derives his theory, is a three-term relation of sign, object, and interpretant yielding an infinite semiotics. In *Of Grammatology*, Jacques Derrida acknowledges, “Peirce goes very far in the direction of de-construction.” Dewey rejects the metaphysics of presence. However, Peirce and he affirms habits of action that serve as “logical interpretants,” which translate semiotic systems into concrete action in specific situations allowing us to sometimes solve (social, political, economic, education, etc.) problems. However, since the action is itself a sign—an interpretant—logical interpretants do not stop the play of signs, but they do allow pragmatists to readily engage in practical action in the empirical world to ameliorate situations in ways Derrida admits he cannot do easily.

InCID: Would you see some connections between John Dewey and Gilles Deleuze, since both reject universalisms and as a consequence, a patchwork emerges as principle of knowledge production and organization?

Jim Garrison: I have not read enough Deleuze to comment. However, I can say that for Dewey, embodied habits are universals. That is to say, they are generalized responses to a general class of stimuli. If we become conscious of our habits, we may even state them as universal linguistic propositions. However, habits are contingent and constantly subject to change, so there are no fixed and final universals. Further, universals are only valid for the domain in which they have proven empirically successful. They may fail in new contexts (for example, travel to another culture or another planet). Charles Darwin influenced Dewey. Universals evolve in an ever-changing world just like biological species. More than 99% of all species that have ever existed are now extinct. That provides a good idea of the ultimate fate of any universal for pragmatists like Dewey who reject both Platonism and Kantianism.

InCID: Gilles Deleuze admires American pragmatism as well as American literature such as the novels by Herman Melville (*Moby Dick* and *Bartleby*), not to mention the poetry of Walt Whitman, in which structure he sees the power of the conjunction ‘and’ joining the fragments. The conjunction ‘and’ is part of rizhomatic structure as described by Deleuze and Guattari in *Thousand Plateaus*. Do you see any connection between this logic with the learning process described by John Dewey?

Jim Garrison: Dewey also thinks in terms of “both/and” rather than “either/or,” and would have thought we could always get beyond Derrida’s “neither/nor.” Dewey’s logic is inclusive. We should always realize that a concept is an arbitrary construction created to serve our purposes and can always be deconstructed and reconstructed. Dewey thought of concepts in much the same way as the pragmatist William James. For James, there is a stream of consciousness and then there are concepts. For James, the stream of consciousness (the stream of experience for Dewey) always overflows any concept. My way of stating it is that we should never confuse the buckets of water we took from the stream of experience to logically analyze for our interests in a given inquiry with the actual stream of existence. We should never confuse essences (linguistic and logical meanings) for the existence from which we construct them to satisfy our needs, desires, and purposes.

I should mention that Walt Whitman was also Dewey’s favorite poet. He called Whitman the prophet of democracy. Whitman always insisted it remained for the reader to interpret the meaning of his poems. He saw “you” the reader as a co-creator. Dewey, following Peirce, always left it to the interpreter (who possessed emotional, active, and intellectual interpretants) to interpret the meaning of a sign. In this way, the meaning of a text may evolve forever. It has a rizhomatic character. For Dewey, the only aim of education was growth. The meaning of life is to make more meaning.

InCID: Pragmatism have influenced knowledge organization in Scandinavian countries where it is associated with the Russian activity theory. Do you see any linkage between Dewey and Vygotski?

Jim Garrison: There are many linkages. We should not forget that Hegel influenced both of them, although Marx, whom Dewey rightly believed misinterpreted Hegel’s dialectic, also influenced Vygotsky. Both Dewey and Vygotsky stressed the importance of mediation (labor, tools, and language) as well as social coordination. However, at the time of his death, Vygotsky was beginning to increasingly stress the philosophy of consciousness. He was becoming more interested in the growth of consciousness than the growth of social meaning.

Dewey thought consciousness was simply the transient focus of experience. Vygotsky's shift would have made it difficult for him to arrive at the same profound understanding of the social construction of meaning Dewey was eventually able to obtain

InCID: Finally, information studies has its own Dewey, Melvin Dewey (1851-1931) contemporary of John Dewey (1859-1952) and both were hegelian in their youth. Melvin was responsible for a bibliographic classification system used in libraries worldwide. Could you say something about Hegel readings in American of the nineteen century?

Jim Garrison: German immigrants exercised a great deal of influence in the United States from the beginning. The German intellectuals fleeing the failed revolution of 1848 brought Hegelian thought with them. They also distinguished themselves during our civil war (1861-1865) on the side of the victorious north. William Torrey Harris and Henry Conrad Brokmeyer founded the St. Louis Hegelians who exercised considerable influence on philosophy in the U.S. in the second half of the nineteenth century. Harris was born in the U.S. In St. Louis, he worked with many German immigrants such as Brokmeyer. He eventually became the United States commissioner of Education. Brokmeyer was a Prussian immigrant that arrived in the New York at the age of 16. Politically active, he became the lieutenant governor of Missouri from 1877 to 1881. Together, they established The Journal of Speculative Philosophy in 1867 as the official journal of the St. Louis Philosophical Society founded in 1866. John Dewey's first publications were in The Journal of Speculative Philosophy and Harris urged the young Dewey to pursue philosophical study. James A. Good's 2006 book, John Dewey's Permanent Hegelian Deposit is the definitive work on Hegel's influence on Dewey. Dewey used Darwin to completely naturalize Hegel. Further, like many contemporary Hegel scholars, Dewey did not think Hegel's "Absolute" was a totalizing concept that concluded history. I am pleased to say Jim Good and I have recently had a paper on Dewey and Hegel accepted for publication in The Journal of Speculative Philosophy.

The editorial board of **InCID** is grateful to prof. Garrison by the kindness with which he received the invitation for this interview.