

This passage appears in the book Pierce-Arrow, by Susan Howe (copyright ©1999 by Susan Howe). Used by permission of New Directions Publishing Corp.

It is part of the first chapter, introducing the work Howe did on the founder of pragmatism, Charles Sanders Peirce. Note here the not very pragmatic or the poetic, his name and that of the title and how they differ. Howe's work is sort of recreation of his life, and her own, in meeting him. This passage below is near the beginning in a chapter named after the house where he lived, Arisbe, and beginning also with two manuscript pages and a poem on war, death, and assertions.

Howe then turns to a description of her passages to the papers of Peirce:

During the summer of 1997 I spent many hours in New Haven in the bowels of Sterling Library because that's where the microform room is, almost underground, next to preservation. In an adjoining more cryptlike corridor, behind some discarded, hopelessly outdated computer terminals and microfilm viewers (nothing from the outside or inside will ever be seen on them again) the 38-reel *Charles S. Peirce Papers 1859-1913 (inclusive), [Microform] Film misc. 948* is packed inside two drawers of a slate-gray metal file cabinet. No one stays for long in this passage or chamber because it's freezing and the noise from air-conditioning generators the university recently installed in a sub-basement immediately underneath resembles roaring or loud sobbing.

Suppose a man is locked in a
room and does not want to go
out his staying is voluntary
is he at liberty no necessity
What shall we finally say if
Members of the Department of
Philosophy Harvard University
undertake the task of sorting
his papers now in the custody
of Harvard's Houghton Library

The microform room at Sterling has several new microfilm readers with Xerox copiers attached. At the left of each viewing screen there is a thin slot for a copy card. Above each slot five singular electric letters spell H E L L O in red as if to confide affection.

in all their minute and terrible details these five little icons could be teeth.

A microphotograph is a type of photograph nearly as old as photography itself, in which an original document is reproduced in a size too small to be read by the naked eye so here the human mind can understand far from it. Film in the form of a strip 16 or 35 millimeters wide bearing a photographic record on a reduced scale of printed or other graphic matter for storage or transmission in a small space is enlarged to be read on a reading machine combining a light source and screen together in a compact cabinet. The original remains perfect by being perfectly what it is because you can't touch it.

Upstairs at the circulation desk, an employee has put a nondescript signal on the horizontal black strip that bisects the verso oblong surface of my white place YALE UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES (Lux et Veritas) copy card so the space the cut encloses now represents five dollars. As if invisibility is the only reality on the rapid highway of mechanical invention H E L L O draws card number 156186 inside itself with a hiss.

It is strange how the dead appear in dreams where another space provides our living space as well. Another language another way of speaking so quietly always there in the shape of memories, thoughts, feelings, which are extra-marginal outside of primary consciousness, yet must be classed as some sort of unawakened finite infinite articulation. Documents resemble people talking in sleep. To exist is one thing, to be perceived another. I can spread historical information, words and words we can never touch hovering around subconscious life where enunciation is born, in distinction from what it enunciates when nothing rests in air when what is knowledge?