

Designation

1899-1900 [c.] | Notes on Topical Geometry | MS [R] 142:4; CP 8.368 n. 23

There is [...] an important distinction between two classes of indices. Namely, some merely stand for things or individual quasi-things with which the interpreting mind is already acquainted, while others may be used to ascertain facts. Of the former class, which may be termed *designations*, personal, demonstrative, and relative pronouns, proper names, the letters attached to a geometrical figure, and the ordinary letters of algebra are examples. They act to force the attention to the thing intended. Designations are absolutely indispensable both to communication and to thought. No assertion has any meaning unless there is some designation to show whether the universe of reality or what universe of fiction is referred to. The other class of indices may be called *reagents*. Thus water placed in a vessel with a shaving of camphor thrown upon it will show whether the vessel is clean or not. If I say that I live two and a half miles from Milford, I mean that a rigid bar that would just reach from one line to another upon a certain bar in Westminster, might be successively laid down on the road from my house to Milford, 13200 times, and so laid down on my reader's road would give him a knowledge of the distance between my house and Milford. Thus, the expression "two miles and a half" is, not exactly a reagent, but a description of a reagent. A scream for help is not only intended to force upon the mind the knowledge that help is wanted, but also to force the will to accord it. It is, therefore, a reagent used rhetorically. Just as a designation can denote nothing unless the interpreting mind is already acquainted with the thing it denotes, so a reagent can indicate nothing unless the mind is already acquainted with its connection with the phenomenon it indicates.