

Peirce's Twenty-Eight Classes of Signs and the Philosophy of Representation. Rhetoric, Interpretation and Hexadic Semiosis

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Chapter 2. The Transition

This chapter traces some of the ways in which Peirce's triadic conception of sign-systems came under considerable pressure during the years following the Lowell Lectures, principally between 1904 and 1907, and examines the theoretical developments which occurred in this period, their contribution to the pioneering features of the later sign-systems and, ultimately, to the problematic status that befell the speculative rhetoric/methodeuteic branch of the general philosophy. Since the chronological approach has been adopted throughout this study, the transitional period from 1904 to 1907 is examined from the point of view of the various sign-systems Peirce developed prior to what constitutes a veritable semiotic revolution.^[1]

From a methodological point of view, the chapter will examine material year by year from 1904, finishing with a discussion of a specific set of denominations of interpretants from 1907. However, this essentially chronological approach will, on occasion, require that material from later years be adduced in support of ideas advanced in earlier ones. There are many important texts – manuscripts, correspondence, published papers etc. – from this period which merit discussion, but since this is not a general introduction to Peirce's philosophy for reasons of clarity and economy I have chosen to prioritize one major text and a relevant classification per year.

It might be asked why we should bother to examine any of these classifications in detail. The reasons are simple. First, in the four and a half years between August 1904 and December 1908 Peirce established in letters, drafts and the Logic Notebook no fewer than twelve different, mainly complete, typologies – an amazing number – whereas in the almost forty-year period between 1866 and 1903 there was only one complete classification system – his single-division 'first and most fundamental' trichotomy – and none of significance from 1909 on, surely testimony to the considerable experimentation undertaken by Peirce in the period to which this chapter is devoted.

Second, in their often very diverse ways, these typologies yield important insights into the way Peirce's conception of sign-action developed between the two major statements on signs of 1903 and 1908, which is why a comprehensive sample from the Logic Notebook has been included as an appendix. More-over such an analysis enables us to follow closely Peirce's own methodology, namely definition and division in the exemplary manner of a zoologist. The chronological approach is primordial as the well-known 1903 system has to vie with the later one from 1908 as a typological instrument, and it is of theoretical interest to track the stages by which the later emerged from the earlier: this can be seen from a comparison of selected typologies. In short, while [Chapter 1](#) finished with [Table 1.2](#), which set out the ten classes obtained from his 1903 triadic definition of the sign, the present chapter takes over from there, but the classifications, which in all but one case are set out in tabular fashion, differ significantly in that there are no longer just three correlates in his new conception of the action of a sign, but six.

Third, and most importantly, there is Peirce's testimony as to the importance of these classifications in his logical researches. Anticipating the discussions of the texts from which they have been extracted, we should consider the following statement:

My excuse for not answering the question scientifically [that those signs that have a logical interpretant are either general or closely connected with generals] is that I am, as far as I know, a pioneer, or rather a backwoodsman, in the work of clearing and opening up what I call semiotic, that is, the doctrine of the essential nature and fundamental varieties of possible semiosis; and I find the field too vast, the labor too great, for a first-comer. (R318 119, 1907)

There is no mistaking Peirce's research project here – it is to identify all possible varieties of signs. He doesn't mention classifications as such at this point, nor does he give a single typology of consequence in the text 'Pragmatism' from which the quotation is drawn. It is nevertheless by a complex process of definition and division and with the subsequent classification of the results that Peirce saw his task as a logician. Should there be any doubt as to this, the following statement from a letter to William James echoes the first, but in more detail: 'My classification of signs, however, is intended to be a classification of possible signs and therefore observation of existing signs is only of use in suggesting and reminding one of varieties that one might otherwise overlook' (EP2 500, 1909). The letter outlines the projected grand logic, the remnants of the philosophy of representation, here referred to as his 'System of Logic', and Peirce is describing yet again the field of speculative grammar.^[2] Finally, it should be noted that alterations made on the classifications by Peirce in the Logic Notebook, for example, concerning, principally, the denominations of the interpretants, and deemed of theoretical interest, are included in 'barred' form: for example, proper signified Interpretant, where the label 'proper' has been struck out in the manuscript.

However, before examining the definitions and the typologies they generated during this period the general scene is set by this astonishing judgement from Peirce on his work on the classification of signs to be found on the page dated 1 November 1909, in his Logic Notebook:

During the last 3 years I have been resting from my work on the Divisions of Signs and have only lately – in the last week or two been turning back to it; and I find my work of 1905 better than any since that time, though the latter doubtless has value and must not be passed by without consideration. Looking over the book labelled in red "The Prescott Book", and also this one, I find the entries in this book of "Provisional Classification of 1906 March 31" and of 1905 October 13 particularly important from my present (accidentally limited, no doubt) point of view; particularly in regard to the point made in the Prescott Book 1909 Oct 28 and what immediately precedes that in that book but is not dated.

Namely, a good deal of my early attempts to define the difference between Icon, Index, & Symbol, were adulterated with confusion with the distinction as to the Reference of the Dynamic Interpretant to the Sign. (R339 360r (H674))

What is striking about these remarks is that only a year earlier Peirce had confidently presented his six and ten divisions in a letter to Lady Welby, dated 23 December, and had spent the days following working feverishly on attempts to organize the latter set. His remarks pertain specifically to the Logic Notebook, judging by the references to the typologies of 31 October 1905, and 31 March 1906, which seemed particularly important for their methodology and notational conventions, and one can only suppose that he had forgotten the 1908 letter to Lady Welby and the subsequent drafts in his portfolio. Surprisingly, too, the page also testifies to his dissatisfaction, some 40 years after having first introduced it, with aspects of the trichotomy defining the icon, the index and the symbol. The note continues thus:

The amount of labour still required upon the ten trichotomies of signs (and more than these ten I don't enquire into, not because I don't think they are in truth there, but simply because it will be all I possibly can do to define and to prove these ten) is enough of itself to occupy the ten ± years of efficient thinking that may remain to me if no accident cuts them short. (R339 360r (H674))

We can therefore conclude that six years after the Lowell Lectures on logic, Peirce was still not satisfied with his work on the classification of signs: his methodology of definition and division had even at this late date not produced results that satisfied him (if any would). This chapter

therefore also seeks to investigate possible reasons causing this dissatisfaction – the intellectual restlessness which characterizes much of Peirce’s work is insufficient justification – and it holds that these can reasonably be found in the typologies he developed during the period between the Lowell Lectures of 1903 and the revolutionary set of definitions and divisions set out in the letter of 23 December 1908, which is discussed in detail in [Chapter 3](#).

1904

In spite of the fact that there are a number of texts of interest to a study of the development of Peirce’s logic at this time, the main thrust of this section of the chapter concerns the letter to Lady Welby dated 12 October 1904: it offers an important definition of the sign and an accompanying six-division classification, and therefore makes a useful starting-point to the chapter. Rather in the manner of R478 (EP2 267–72), discussed in [Chapter 1](#), the letter begins with a detailed account of the categories which leads naturally to the definitions. This in itself is of interest as the definitions of the sign and the twenty-eight or sixty-six classes to which it can be assigned as described in the letter dated 23 December 1908, on the other hand, are prefaced by a detailed discussion not of the categories, but of three universes and their modes of being.

Two objects

In 1904 Peirce was led to expand the set of correlates involved in the action of a sign and, with this expansion, to envisage a corresponding amplification of the number of divisions of signs it made available: therein lay two theoretical problems he was never quite able to resolve, namely the problem of reconciling in a single typology two distinct types of trichotomy, one involving relations between correlates and one involving the correlates themselves, and that of establishing their order of occurrence in the classification. An early account of what this expansion involved can be seen in the introduction to the typology which he proposed to Lady Welby in the October 1904 letter, although he doesn’t seem to have mentioned the possibility of this initial hexadic system generating twenty-eight classes of signs:

I am now prepared to give my division of signs, as soon as I have pointed out that a sign has two objects, its object as it is represented and its object in itself. It has also three interpretants, its interpretant as represented or meant to be understood, its interpretant as it is produced, and its interpretant in itself. Now signs may be divided as to their own material nature, as to their relations to their objects, and as to their relation to their interpretants. (CP 8.333)

An initial problem to be addressed, then, is what might have led Peirce to expand the original correlate system in this way. One possible explanation concerns traditional accounts of the sign and the two objects. Peirce notes on several occasions that past logicians have generally recognized two objects, as in this extract from the ‘Pragmatism’ text: ‘But all logicians distinguished two objects of a sign; the one, the Immediate object or object as the sign represents it, (and without this a sign would not be a sign); the other Real object, or object as it is independent of any particular idea representing it’ (R318 373, 1907).^[3] He adds to this as an afterthought a remark which, if taken independently of his attempts in this particular set of notes to use the semiotics as his proof of pragmatism, we would find particularly sibylline: ‘Of course, many signs have no real objects.’

As with his use of the term ‘representamen’, as he originally called the sign, the adoption of the two objects could be accounted for by his acquaintance with the philosophy of the eighteenth-century Scottish philosopher Thomas Reid, through his knowledge of Sir William Hamilton’s edition of his work. The following is a suggestive sample of Reid’s discussion of cognition quoted by Deledalle (2000: 133):

The Leibnitio-Wolfians [...] distinguished three acts in the process of representative cognition:

1° the act of representing a (mediate) object to the mind;

2° the representation, or more properly speaking, representamen, itself as an (immediate or vicarious) object exhibited to the mind;

3° the act by which the mind is conscious immediately of the representative object, and, through it, immediately of the remote object represented. (Reid 1863: 877n.)

The terminology and concepts in this short extract are echoed in similar, if not identical, fashion by Peirce in his discussions of the sign and its two objects: ‘representative object’ and ‘remote object’ correspond, respectively, to what Peirce refers to in the letter to Lady Welby as the ‘object as it is represented’ and the ‘object in itself’, and thus, respectively, to what he most frequently refers to as the sign’s ‘immediate’ and ‘dynamic’ (also ‘dynamical’, or ‘dynamoid’) objects. In view of the preceding remarks, it is thus possible to conclude that Peirce was led to adopt the two objects through respect for a philosophical tradition which, according to Short (2007: 179–80), can be traced back to the Stoics.^[4] Peirce himself had already used the expression back in 1868.^[5] A justification for just two objects beside the three interpretants is to be found in the efforts to deduce his pragmatism from his semiotic theory:

As I said above, the object is the idea or thing that the sign finds, the meaning what it leaves. The immediate object resembles the emotional meaning in being common to all signs, and also in being subjective. The real object corresponds to the existential meaning very obviously. Plainly, the reason for there being a third meaning but no third object must be grounded in the essential differences between the relations of the two correlates of the sign. The object is antecedent, the meaning subsequent to the sign. That third meaning, therefore, must be in some sort of future tense. (R318 677–79, 1907)

There is, nevertheless, a more logically justified reason for establishing the two objects and three interpretants in 1904,^[6] involving three important interrelated concepts, namely, the complexity structure of the triadic relation within which the sign operates and is exemplified in the correlate order of Representamen, Object and Interpretant of any triadic relation; the three categories – which Peirce had just defined anew in considerable detail in the letter to Lady Welby quoted earlier; and, also, the notion of ‘degeneracy’ within the categories discussed in Chapter 1. These were not new ideas in 1903, as Peirce had already developed the idea of degenerate grades in a ‘Guess at the Riddle’. However, there is an intriguing entry in the Logic Notebook on the verso side of the page dated 10 July 1903 (R339 239v (H449)), although more likely to have been added at a date presumably later than 7 August 1904 (R339 240r (H451)), in which Peirce gives the genuine and degenerate forms of the icon-index-symbol division and the genuine and two degenerate forms of the rheme-dicent-argument division (Table 2.1).^[7]

Table 2.1. The typology of August 1904?

August 1904?	239v	(H450)
B Icon	B Index	B symbol
are Icon Index Symbol		
in the genuine sense		
A Icon	A Index	A Symbol
are Icon Index Symbol		
in the degenerate sense		
C Rheme	C Dicent	C Argument
are Rheme	Dicent	Argument

August 1904?	239v	(H450)
in the genuine sense		
Rheme is represented in the proper signified Interpretant as if a Quality of the Object		
Dicent is represent [sic] in the signified Interpretant as if in a Real Relation to its Object		
Argument is represented in the signified Interpretant as if it were a Sign		
Rheme professes to describe a quality		
Dicent has two terms professing to describe Quality & Existent		
Argument has 3 terms professing to be Major Quality, Minor Existent, Middle Sign		
B Rheme	B Dicent	B Argument
are Degenerate Rheme Dicent Argument		
B Rheme determines its interpretant formally by definition making it one sign		
B Dicent determines its interpretant by force		
B Argument determines its dynamic interpretant by its being represented as doing so		
B Dicent has to be asserted		C Dicent may be asserted
A Rheme	A Dicent	A Argument
are Dedegenerate Rheme Dicent Argument		

NB probably follows 7 August 1904

There are two things of importance to note here. First, genuine-degenerate categorial distinctions are used to define the subdivisions of the typology. With respect to the object, the letter A serves to indicate the 'degenerate' form in the first division and what is presumably in this period the 'doubly degenerate' form in the second, although Peirce doesn't mention the term. B is the genuine form in the first division and the degenerate in the second. C is the genuine form in the sign-interpretant division, while B is the degenerate form and A is the doubly degenerate form (indicated as 'De-degenerate' in the final line). Second, rather in the manner of the quotation from EP2 275 (below)⁴⁵Peirce associates the interpretants with the subdivisions of the two relational trichotomies he had now defined, although here rhemes, for example, are defined to be represented in the signified and dynamic interpretants, whereas in R478 a member of a given subdivision may have an element from another subdivision as its interpretant, for example, the index may have an 'Individual [Singular] Symbol' for its indirect Interpretant (EP2 275). The denominations of the interpretants have changed – but the principle is more or less the same. Moreover, there is no division corresponding to the sign on 46th the table. Nevertheless, even without the sign another notable feature of the table is the order of presentation of the correlates Peirce is using as criteria for the classification of the sign: the genuine precedes the degenerate form, which, with respect to the single interpretant in this case, precedes the doubly degenerate; another is the fact that the attempted typology deals with the classes of signs from 1903. In later typologies Peirce replaces this method of deriving subdivisions by divisions obtained by a combination of the six correlates themselves and four relational criteria, each subdivided by either of three modes of being, although Peirce may have conceived of a possible hexadic expansion of the original triadic relation as early as 1903, as Short has suggested:

Composed largely in one month, the 'Syllabus' shows a swift development of thought; for example, in the third section, signs are divided by two trichotomies, but in the fifth section, a third

trichotomy is introduced and placed in first position [...]. In fact, several other trichotomies are suggested in the fifth section as well, although this seems not to have been noticed. (2007: 237)

Short doesn't enlarge on this statement. However, the idea that Peirce was thinking of further trichotomies in 1903 is supported not so much by the discussion of the various triadic relations in the fifth section of the Syllabus as, rather, by a reference to three interpretants – immediate, imperfect and indirect – in the earlier third section.

Although the immediate Interpretant of an Index must be an Index, yet since its Object may be the Object of an Individual [Singular] Symbol, the Index may have such a Symbol for its indirect Interpretant. Even a genuine Symbol may be an imperfect Interpretant of it. So, an icon may have a degenerate Index, or an Abstract Symbol, for an indirect Interpretant, and a genuine Index or Symbol for an imperfect Interpretant. (CP 2.294, 1903)

This brings us to the interpretants, accounting for the emergence of which is more problematic. Whether by tradition or, more likely, as a result of Peirce's personal theory of the action of a sign, it is clear that the representamen and the two objects were established philosophical concepts in his system in 1903.^[8] The three interpretants, on the other hand, were completely innovative. Furthermore, as can be seen from the surprising remarks quoted above from the Logic Notebook concerning the ten divisions (R339 360r (H674)), they also had to be defined and proved. In view of the terminological hesitations characterizing the various descriptions of the interpretants we cannot be sure that he was ever able to do this to his satisfaction. Here again, as before, it is the combination of the theory of the categories together with the ordering and the relative complexity of the three correlates of 1903 that suggests the emergence of the three interpretants: 'It is now necessary to point out that there are three kinds of interpretant. Our categories suggest them, and the suggestion is confirmed by careful examination' he wrote in 1907 (R318, 251). To this should be added a description of the correlates from a relational perspective to be found in the same series of variants, in which the third interpretant is seen as a future tense:

If there are three interpretants and only two objects, – the object and the interpretant being the correlates of every sign, – the reason of this discrepancy can only lie in some difference between the relations of the Object and of the Interpretant, respectively, to the Sign. The object is the antecedent, the interpretant the consequent of the sign. The reason sought must, then, be in this, that the interpretant is, in some sense, in a future tense, relatively to the sign, while the object is in a past tense. (R318 381, 1907)

Even later he writes to Lady Welby that it is the definition of the sign that determines what the three interpretants are like: 'Your ideas of Sense, Meaning, and Significance seem to me to have been obtained through a prodigious sensitiveness of Perception that I cannot rival, while my three grades of Interpretant were worked out by reasoning from the definition of a Sign what sort of thing ought to be noticeable and then searching for its appearance' (SS 111, 1909). For whatever reasons he was led to establish three interpretants it is important to note that the letter to Lady Welby included a relatively full description of a new hexadic formula for the classification of signs. [Table 2.2](#) sets out the gist of the typology proposed by Peirce in the letter and, like [Table 2.1](#), is of interest for the way it reflects the innovative direction his conception of signs was taking.

The hexad of 1904

Returning now to the letter itself it is interesting to note that after having detailed the six new divisions Peirce paradoxically completes his presentation of the material set out in [Table 2.2](#) with the recapitulation of the ten classes obtained from the 1903 Lowell Lectures. He seems not to have envisaged either in the letter or in the Logic Notebook the possibility of generating twenty-eight classes of signs. He recapitulates the ten classes, too, in the postscript to the draft of 28 December 1908 (CP 8.376), which suggests not only that he was far from satisfied with his

work on the ten divisions but also that he found the original 10-class system logically complete and correspondingly more satisfactory.

Table 2.2. The six-division typology of October 1904

12 October 1904	Letter to Lady Welby	CP 8.334-8.339
As it is in itself, a sign is		
of the nature of an appearance = qualisign		
an individual object or event = sinsign		
of the nature of a general type = legisign		
In respect to their relations to their dynamic objects		
Icon	sign determined by its dynamic object by virtue of its own internal nature	
Index	sign determined by its dynamic object by virtue of being in a real relation to it	
Symbol	sign determined by its dynamic object only in the sense that it will be so interpreted	
In respect to its immediate object a sign may either be a sign of quality, of an existent, or of a law		
In regard to its relation to its signified interpretant, a sign is either a Rheme, a Dicent, or an Argument		
A sign may appeal to its dynamic interpretant in three ways:		
1st, an argument only may be submitted to its interpretant		
2nd, an argument or dicent may be urged upon the interpretant by an act of insistence.		
3rd Argument or dicent may be and a rheme can only be, presented to the interpretant for contemplation.		
In its relation to its immediate interpretant, I would divide signs into three classes as follows:		
1st, those which are interpretable in thoughts or signs of the same kind in infinite series		
2nd, those which are interpretable in actual experiences		
3rd, those which are interpretable in qualities of feelings or appearances		

The typology, like that of [Table 2.1](#), maintains the subclasses of signs from 1903 – qualisign and icon, for example – but here includes a division for the sign itself. The order in which the divisions are presented and set out for purposes of comparison as [Figure 2.1](#) is the same as that in [Table 2.2](#),^[9] an order which led Hardwick to remark that the ordering of the first and third of the three interpretant trichotomies differed from the one Peirce seemed to prefer (SS 35n22). Indeed the orderings displayed on the two tables above are the only examples to be found either in the correspondence or in the Logic Notebook.⁴⁹We note, too, that the terminology concerning the interpretants is identical to that in [Table 2.1](#) and that the order in which they figure in the typology seems similarly to be determined by phenomenological complexity. Of the three interpretant trichotomies, the final one, S-li, was dropped, presumably because Peirce realized that neither the Oi nor the li divisions can be relational as he subsequently considered the correspondence between them as a sort of ‘mirror image’ of each other (not Peirce’s term): the immediate object representing the dynamic object and the immediate interpretant being

the sign's inherent interpretability (SS 111), and as such a necessary 'semantic reflection' of the former according to the sign's particular mode of being.^[10]

Figure 2.1. The six divisions of 1904

S, S–Od, S–Oi S–If, S–Id, S–Ii

1905

Sign

Although this section deals with material from 1905, this year and the following one could easily have been taken together as the relevant texts overlap with respect to the theoretical material they contain. These are a draft dated by Hardwick as July 1905 (SS 189–94), a manuscript R793 from 1906 which presents a striking similitude to the 1905 draft, the relevant pages from the Logic Notebook and an important text from 9 March 1906. The draft of 1905 begins, as was the case in the Lowell Lectures and the 12 October 1904 letter to Lady Welby, with a discussion of the categories ('My three categories appear always more clear to me' (SS 189)), as a theoretical springboard for a presentation of the sign. His discussion of the 'three grades of structure' of what he now calls the 'phaneron' – Primans, Secundans and Tertians – leads him to define the sign in terms of active and passive correlates:

A "Sign" is anything, A, which,
(1) in addition to characters of its own,
(2) stands in a dyadic relation r , to a purely active correlate,
(3) and is also in a triadic relation to B for a purely passive correlate,
C, this triadic relation being such as to determine C to be [in?]^[11] a dyadic relation, S,
to B, the relation S corresponding in a recognized way to the relation r .
(SS 192)

The importance of this definition is that the idea of sign-action being a process of representation is now replaced in this formal statement by the expressions 'stands in a dyadic relation ... and also in a triadic relation': we see Peirce here moving from the rigid triadic definition of a relation as in 1903 to this more dynamic conception of sign-action involving an active-passive constraint, surely evidence of a movement away from the sign as a substitute, 'standing for' its object.

Representamen

Moreover, according to the definition S, a relation, is different from A, defined as the sign. This corresponds to remarks that Peirce then makes in the draft concerning the concept of the 'representamen', a long-standing source of contention among Peirce scholars and enthusiasts. He begins by introducing the preferred terminology: 'I use "Sign" in the widest sense of the definition. It is a wonderful case of an almost popular use of a very broad word in almost the exact sense of the scientific definition' (SS 193) and then goes on to add: 'I formerly preferred the word representamen. But there was no need of this horrid long word. On the contrary, it requires some stretching to cover such imperative ejaculations of drivers, as, "Hi!" or "Hullah" ...' (SS 193). He adds a little later in the draft that 'I thought of the representamen as taking the place of the thing; but a sign is not a substitute' (SS 193). The whole draft seems thus to suggest that during this period Peirce was beginning to realize that the correlates were independent, each with its own specificity and function, and that sign-action was to be represented as a truly dynamic process, positions confirmed by R793 and the draft of 1906.

Why should the concept of the representamen create a theoretical problem? The confusion turns on what scholars consider to be a sign and how it relates to the representamen. We have already

referred to Peirce's 1903 definitions concerning triadic relations, which are composed of representamen, object and interpretant in order of increasing complexity (CP 2.235–237), and to the rider that 'A Sign is a Representamen of which some Interpretant is a cognition of a mind. Signs are the only representamens that have been much studied' (CP 2.242). In 1903 the sign was clearly a species of representamen, representamens also being the first correlates of triadic relations which do not necessarily have mental interpretants. However, some Peirce scholars advance the idea that the sign is, like semiosis, a process or relation in which representamen, object and interpretant participate as its three correlates. This is essentially the position adopted by Merrell, who writes:

Peirce's sign sports three components (Figure 2.1). What usually goes for sign in everyday talk Peirce called a representamen. He did so in order to distinguish the representamen from the other two sign components, that, as we shall note, can become signs in their own right. The representamen is something that enters into relation with its object, the second component of the sign The third component of the sign is the interpretant. (2001: 28)

Merrell's Figure 2.1 represents the sign as a rotor-type three-way structure with the three 'components' branching from a central hub. Quite apart from the dubious nature of the idea that the object can also become a sign, the passage and illustration clearly assimilate the sign to the entire triadic relation and consequently to what Peirce was later to define as the process of semiosis. This is essentially the idea advanced in Deely (2014), who doesn't state unequivocally that the sign has the representamen as one of its components, but quotes Benedict (1985), who does:

The undeniable use for "representamen" in semeiotic is to be the name of one of the three branches of the triadic relation. The other two branches have names; i.e., object and interpretant. The remaining branch frequently, nay, almost universally, has been called sign. However, that is really poor form! The word "sign" should be reserved for the triadic relation. Refusal to do this has generated and perpetuated a source of ambiguity that has been unnecessarily deceptive. (1985: 265–66)

I suggest that the source of ambiguity has been perpetuated by scholars who have not paid sufficient attention to Peirce's post-1903 theory of the sign, and to the 1905 draft in particular. For his part, Benedict was clearly indulging in a piece of wishful thinking: 'Concerning the matter of reinstating the term [representamen], there seems to be an undeniable use for the term in semeiotic. Of course, this assumes that the connotation of "sign" includes its being a triadic relation' (1985: 265). He has proved nothing but has neglected the later writings, drafts and correspondence. For, by this time, Peirce must have been beginning to think of the nature of the association of the six correlates and of the process of 'semeiosis', (CP 5.473, 1907) or semiosis, which he introduced in 1907 as being the cooperation of three subjects, a sign, its object and its interpretant:

It is important to understand what I mean by semiosis. All dynamical action, or action of brute force, physical or psychical, either takes place between two subjects [whether they react equally upon each other, or one is agent and the other patient, entirely or partially] or at any rate is a resultant of such actions between pairs. But by 'semiosis' I mean, on the contrary, an action, or influence, which is, or involves, a cooperation of three subjects, such as a sign, its object, and its interpretant, this tri-relative influence not being in any way resolvable into actions between pairs. (CP 5.484, 1907)

This strongly suggests that the scholars mentioned above, and many others no doubt, have confused sign and semiosis, to the mystification of the newcomer to Peirce's semiotics. By this time Peirce preferred the term 'sign' and was in the process of replacing the sign's representative function ('a sign stands for ...') by one of mediation. The temporary rejection of the representamen was surely representative of a shift of perspective in Peirce's view of sign-action. The rejection of the term was indeed temporary, for in 1911, in a projected article titled 'A Sketch of Logical Critics' (R675), Peirce was to return to the concept of the representamen, attributing to it a slightly different logical status, one akin to the distinction made between symbols and their replicas in 1903, with the sign nevertheless retained as a species of representamen:

In the first place, a "Representamen", like a word, —indeed most words are Representamens, — is not a single thing, but is of the nature of a mental habit, it consists in the fact that some-thing would be. The twenty odd thes on an ordinary page are all one and the same word, — that is, they are so many instances of a single word. Here are two instances of Representamens: "— killed—", "a man". The first of several characters which are each of them either essential to a sign's being truly called an instance of a Representamen or else necessary properties of such an object is that it should have power to draw the attention of any mind that is fit to "interpret" it to two or more "Objects" of it. The first of the above examples or instances of representamens has four objects; the second has two. (R675 39–40, 1911)^[12]

In view, too, of the fact that by now Peirce had expanded the original triadic relation to what was effectively a hexad, the concept of the representamen defined as the first correlate of a triadic relation was presumably no longer operative. With this final remark regarding the possible reasons for Peirce's rejection of the concept of the representamen, we turn to the manuscript R793. This particular set of pages seems to have been transitional between the 1905 draft and that of 1906, since it shares feature of each. What it has in common with the 1905 draft is the reference to the phaneroscopic 'grades of structure', namely the Primans, Secundans and Tertians on which Peirce constructed the very formal definition of the sign given above. It shares with the draft the definition of sign-action as a sign which is passive in relation to the object but active in relation to the interpretant (R793 2). It also, more anecdotally, contains the same jocular reference to seme, the Italian for seed, from canto XXXIII of the Inferno: Ma se le mie parole esser den seme^[13] (SS 194, 1905; R793 14,^[14] c. 1906), which seems to have been a cue for Peirce to introduce terminology which was to figure prominently both in the 1906 paper 'Prolegomena to an Apology for Pragmaticism' and the later, 1908 hexadic typology to be discussed in [Chapter 3](#): 'seme' which he associated with 'pheme' and 'delome' in 1906 as alternatives to the original rheme-dicent-argument triad, and introducing the terms 'type' and 'token' which were to figure prominently in the later typologies on the same page (SS 194).^[15] We return to R793 below with the discussion of the equally important draft of 9 March 1906. In the meantime, to complete this discussion of Peirce's theorizing in 1905 we examine the typology for 13 October 1905, [Table 2.3](#), one of the two which still found favour with him in the passage from the Logic Notebook of 1909 quoted earlier in the chapter. We know that Peirce was much occupied by classification systems during this period.^[16]

Table 2.3. The typology of 13 October 1905

13 October 1905	262r	(H497)
A Nature of Sign in itself		
Abstraction = Qualisign		
Existent = Sinsign		
Combinant Type = Legisign		
B Of Object		
a Immediate		
In what form Object is represented in Sign { Indef./ Sing. /General as far as affects Form of Sign		
b. Dynamical		
α Nature of Object in Itself {Abstraction/Concrete/Collection		
β Cause of/How Sign is/being determined to represent obj Causation of sign's representing Obj		
C Of Interpretant		

13 October 1905	262r	(H497)
a Immediate		
In what form interpretant is repr. in sign		
As far as it affects form of sign {Interrog/Imper./Significat.		
b Dynamical		
α Nature of Interpretant in Itself		
As far as this affects Nature of sign {Feeling/ Fact/ Sign (? Sign.)		
β Cause of sign being determined to affect/ being represented		
Causation of Sign's affecting Interp. {Sympathy/Compulsion/Representat.		
c Representative		
α In what form sign is represented in Interpretant		
As far as this affects form of sign,		
β Causation of representation of Sign by Interpretant		
As far as this affects nature of the Sign,		
γ Rationale of Connection between Sign and Object effected by Interpretant		

Perhaps the most important feature of [Table 2.3](#) is the fact that by 1905 the six correlates yield a total of ten divisions capable, although Peirce seems not to have mentioned the possibility at the time, of generating sixty-six classes of signs, whereas the earlier typology in [Table 2.2](#) was restricted to a possible twenty-eight. We note, too, that the order of presentation of the correlates differs considerably in 1905. In the letter of 12 October 1904, for example, the order for the two objects and the three (standardized as 'immediate', 'dynamic' and 'final') interpretants was S–Od, S–Oi, S–If, S–Id, S–li, in which the order of occurrence seems still to be dictated, like the material in [Table 2.1](#) above, by the perceived phenomenological complexity of the correlate in question: the dynamic object is somehow genuine and therefore considered to be phenomenologically more complex than the immediate, which, by definition, can never represent it other than partially; and in this view, the final interpretant is genuine, the dynamic degenerate and the immediate doubly degenerate. What we find in [Table 2.3](#), on the other hand, is 'correlate' order: the sign division comes first, followed by the two objects, and, finally by the three interpretants. However, within this order the immediate precedes the dynamic and the dynamic the final, which suggests that Peirce was already adopting the order of semiosis which characterizes the order the sign's correlates in the hexadic typology of 23 December 1908.^[17]

By July 1905 the genuine-degenerate distinction had been replaced by a set of Greek letters, making the whole system more abstract. This is presumably one of the reasons why the typology found special favour with Peirce in 1909, together with the fact that it defined ten divisions. It is significant, too, that the descriptions of the various divisions are organized hierarchically from 'form' to 'nature' to 'connection-combinant', early realizations of the distinction between quality-possibility, existent and generality-necessitant characteristic of the later modes of being. Furthermore, the terminology employed to identify the correlates was beginning to take its final form: immediate and dynamic are relatively stable from now on, while the final interpretant, identified as the representative interpretant in [Table 2.3](#) was to be the object of a series of terminological hesitations. Finally, the typology in [Table 2.3](#), unlike the two previously discussed classifications, offers tentative subdivisions for each of the criteria: qualisign, sinsign and legisign

remain from 1903, but, surprisingly, icon, index and symbol have disappeared as subdivisions. Other divisions anticipate the typologies of 1908: $Bb\alpha$, for example, has the subdivisions Abstraction, Concrete, Collection, which later become the subdivisions corresponding, respectively, to the three universes to which the dynamic object can belong.

1906

A new definition of the sign

We review Peirce's transitional description of the sign and its interpretants in a draft to Lady Welby dated 9 March 1906, before discussing one of the complex classifications the system generates.^[18] In this, probably the most detailed and coherent exposition of his mature theory of semiotics, the several sheets devoted to logic occur towards the middle of a 55-page draft from the Peirce correspondence RL463 (pages 26–33 in the manuscript with pages repeated) in which Peirce discusses, at times quite sternly, a 'pragmatoidal' poem from a volume that Lady Welby had sent him, British and American diction ('spoken dialects') and spelling reform, while the relevant passage is sandwiched between a brief introduction to the Existential Graphs and a longer description of the Graphs illustrated by diagrams. In the following passage he first defines the sign in a radically different way from before and introduces the two objects, after which he proceeds to describe functional aspects of the three interpretants in relative detail. The resultant manner in which signs are now classified is no less radical, and has important implications for the third branch of the philosophy of representation, for a theory of communication and, indeed, for the ecology of signs:

I use the word "Sign" in the widest sense for any medium for the communication or extension of a Form (or feature). Being medium, it is determined by something, called its Object, and determines something, called its Interpretant or Interpretand. But some distinctions have to be borne in mind in order rightly to understand what is meant by the Object and by the Interpretant. In order that a Form may be extended or communicated, it is necessary that it should have been really embodied in a Subject independently of the communication; and it is necessary that there should be another Subject in which the same form is embodied only as a consequence of the communication. The Form, (and the 56Form is the Object of the Sign), as it really determines the former Subject, is quite independent of the sign; yet we may and indeed must say that the object of a sign can be nothing but what the sign represents it to be. Therefore, in order to reconcile these apparently conflicting Truths, it is indispensable to distinguish the immediate object from the dynamical object. (RL463 26–27, 1906)^[19]

This definition of the sign, in a manner not dissimilar to that of the letter of 12 October 1904, introduces the two objects at the same time as the sign. This was not an isolated case of Peirce defining the sign as a medium: 'All my notions are too narrow. Instead of "Sign" ought I not to say Medium?' (R339 293r, 1906). As noted by the editors of EP2 this was a prominent feature of Peirce's research into and on the sign in 1906.^[20] See, too, Robert Marty's discussion of the seventy-six definitions of signs.^[21] The following extracts are from manuscript R793:

For the purposes of this inquiry a Sign may be defined as a Medium for the communication of a Form. It is not logically necessary that anything possessing consciousness, that is, feeling of the peculiar common quality of all our feeling should be concerned. But it is necessary that there should be two, if not three, quasi-minds, meaning things capable of varied determination as to forms of the kind communicated.

As a medium, the Sign is in an essentially triadic relation, to its Object which determined it and to its Interpretant which it determines. In its relation to the Object, the Sign is passive; that is to say, its correspondence to the Object is brought about by an effect upon the sign, the Object remaining unaffected a circumstance otherwise expressed by saying the Object is real. On the other hand, in its relation to its interpretant the Sign is active, determining the interpretant without being itself thereby affected. (R793 1–2, 1906)^[22]

These very radical, and indeed prophetic, definitions raise a number of interesting questions. What, for example, are we to understand by a sign being a medium? What, too, are we to understand by the form that is communicated from the object to the interpretants? And what are the 'subjects' that appear for the first time in a definition of the sign? The following paragraphs address these questions in turn.

Medium

Peirce is using the term 'medium' both literally as a mediating element in the hexadic expansion of the original triadic relation, and metaphorically in the sense of 'vehicle', as an artist might, for whom media or vehicles such as oil and water bear pigments to make paint, while in Peirce's case the sign is a medium or vehicle bearing form to produce meaning. Examples of media that can convey forms extended by the object in this way are to be found everywhere, from the humble painter's sketch-pad ([Figure 2.2](#)), blackboards, sound spectrograms and computer screens to the sorts of neon billboards and giant electronic hoardings outside department stores advertising the wares within: even human skin with branding signs and tattoos can function as a communicating medium according to the 1906 definition of the sign.

Figure 2.2. Artist, model and representation, Adobe Stock.



[Figure 2.2](#) is a good, if simple, example of the way Peirce conceived the sign as a medium at this time. This is a portrait and is obviously far more easily followed as an example of the process of semiosis than, say, a written description of the same scene. It is also necessarily incomplete as only readers of this study can register and account for any interpretant effects that the sign has on them. If we 'go behind the frame' and ignore the fact that we are looking at a photograph, and describe the situation as artist and model experience it, we can see how the sign functions as a medium. We identify the dynamic object as the sitter. The immediate object functions as a 'filter' and is the determinant of the incomplete representation of the model's face being sketched on the sheet of paper, while the sign, as Peirce described it in 1906, is the particular sheet from the sketch-pad on which the artist is working. The artist, on the other hand, as we shall see, was not deemed by Peirce to play a logically significant role in the determining process at the time.

Form

Now both the quotation from the 1906 draft and the extracts from R793 insist upon the fact that the sign is a medium for the communication of a 'Form'. Peirce offers an explanation for this in a variant page 3 of the manuscript:

[That] which is communicated from the Object through the Sign to the Interpretant is a Form. It is not a singular thing; for if a Singular thing were first in the Object and afterward in the Interpretant outside the Object, it must thereby cease to be in the Object. The Form that is communicated does not necessarily cease to be in one thing when it comes to be in a different thing because its being is the being of a predicate. The Being of a Form consists in the truth of a conditional proposition. Under given circumstances something would be true. The Form is in the Object, entitatively as we may say, meaning that that conditional relation, or following of consequence upon reason, which constitutes the Form is literally true of the Object. In the Sign the Form may or may not be embodied entitatively, but it must be embodied representatively, that is, that is, in respect to the Form communicated, the Sign produces upon the interpretant an effect similar to that which the Object itself would under favorable circumstances. (R793 4–5)

Clearly, if what is communicated from the object to the sign is an existent, 'singular', entity it would cease to be in the object once it found its way into the sign, and would cease to be in the sign as soon as it inhaled in the interpretant. This is the basis of Peirce's rejection of the term 'vehicle' as a correlate in a triadic relation, for we find a certain hesitation in Peirce's usage of the term. In the 1905 paper 'Issues of Pragmatism in the Normative Sciences', for example, Peirce also introduces the definition of the sign as a medium of communication, proceeds to give an extended analysis of the term from the point of view of the active-passive correlate relations introduced in the definition of the sign in the 1905 draft above and justifies his reasons for not conceiving the sign as a vehicle at this time by suggesting that the transmission of a fever by a mosquito functioning as a vehicle is not a valid triadic relation since the 'entity of a zymotic disease' can't be in two places at the same time (EP2 391, 1905).^[23] However this rejection is not consistent, see for example, CP2.231 from 1903, CP 5.547 and CP 5.599–601 from 1905 and CP 4.6 from 1906, and in any case, doesn't apply to form.

Continuing the discussion of form we see that it is necessarily a quality: that 'monadic element of the world' (CP 1.426, c. 1896) and consequently the only category of being that can be simultaneously embodied in sign, object and interpretant. In the abstract, the only forms that can be thus communicated are monads, dyads and triads, or combinations thereof. This is Peirce's earlier description of them '... the logical categories of the monad, the dyad, and the polyad or higher set ... are categories of the forms of experience' discussed in [Chapter 1](#) (CP 1.452, 1896). These are the basic forms structuring, for example, the predicates of Firstness, Secondness, and Thirdness, the various subdivisions defined in all of his classificatory divisions and are, indeed, to be found throughout the logic. Media defined by the 1906 statement above simply need to be perceivable and to accommodate such forms emanating, of course, from the dynamic – or what Peirce sometimes called the 'real' – object (e.g. CP 2.310, 1903).

Subject

The question of form in the definition of the sign from the draft of 9 March 1906 raises the further question: what are we to understand by the 'subjects' in the following extract from the quotation: 'In order that a Form may be extended or communicated, it is necessary that it should have been really embodied in a Subject independently of the communication; and it is necessary that there should be another subject in which the same form is embodied only as a consequence of the communication' (RL463 26)? By the term 'subjects' here Peirce is referring to the correlates involved in semiosis, namely the object, the sign and the interpretant (he identifies the utterer and the interpreter as two quasi-minds, who are in no way subjects in the process). This in itself is interesting since, as in another 1906 text, 'Prolegomena to an Apology for Pragmaticism' (e.g. CP 4. 546), he is already anticipating with this terminology later definitions of the sign in which

the correlates are subjects which can be referred, as we shall see in the next chapter, to one or other of three universes as opposed to the categories of 1904 and earlier.

But the draft, with its insistence on the communication of a form, is also prophetic in another way. We today, since the work of Marshal McLuhan, see communication in terms of contemporary technology. In Peirce's day some of the technological developments providing media were the rotary press for newspapers and mail-order catalogues, the photograph and the telegraph, together with Muybridge's moving photography and Edison's Kinetoscope which no doubt inspired him to conceive of his Existential Graphs as 'moving pictures of thought' (CP 4.8, 1906). For McLuhan what is communicated in a message – its 'form' in Peircean terms – is less important than the particular medium through which it is communicated ([1967] 2008: 8), and for McLuhan the technology which functioned as the medium for the message even changed society – individual, family, work, leisure etc. In McLuhan's case the technology included the telephone, TV and radio, for example, and these, he thought, had a unifying influence, creating a 'global village' ([1967] 2008: 156–57). Nevertheless, the formal configurations structuring the messages borne by these technological advances cannot be other than those defined as the monad, dyad and triad – Peirce's categories of the forms of experience – irrespective of the specific medium communicating them.

The actual message may be less important than the medium conveying it, as McLuhan claimed, but what is signified by the message is a realization of one or other, or combinations, of the formal configurations defined by the categories of the forms of experience. Similarly, the media of today are supported most spectacularly by the internet: Facebook, LinkedIn and Skype, for example, offer not so much a global village as a global family or a global workplace. However, irrespective of the type of media, even in those of today, the 'ratio' of form to medium remains the same as when Peirce first defined it at the beginning of the last century.

The role of the object

It is clear that the definition of the sign from the 1906 draft implies a very far-reaching determination principle: the sign, before being uttered, has been antecedently 'pre-formed' by what Peirce was subsequently led to identify as the sign's 'partial objects' and the relations holding between them. Whereas we might intuitively think that the structure of a well-known statement such as:

- (2.1) I saw the best minds of my generation destroyed by madness

is determined spontaneously by the utterer, what Peirce is saying in the definition is that from a logical point of view it is the object composed of its partial objects and the relations holding between them that structure the sign. It follows, therefore, that the whole process of semiosis is 'objective' in the sense that the sole structuring 'agency' in the process is the dynamic object. This conception of sign-action has implications for Peirce's philosophy of representation, for the speculative rhetoric branch in particular, for it means that a rhetorical component in the traditional sense becomes redundant within this expanded logic, since any inflections produced, even if they originate in some animate agent, can only enter the sign through the structure of the object, if we accept the definitions above and their implications. In other words, any such rhetorical or methodological intention is not 'added' to the sign in any way by the utterer, but is part of the form communicated to, or extended in, the sign by the object and thence to the interpretants, most notably to what Peirce, in the draft refers to as the 'intentional interpretant'. Any rhetorical or methodological intent the sign may convey, then, is, within this exposition of the general theory, already programmed in the complex form extended by the object.

Another way of putting this is that in 1906 there is nothing in the sign that hasn't come from the object, or, rather, there is nothing in the immediate object, for which the sign serves as the support, that hasn't been as though filtered from the dynamic object, and by defining the sign simply as a medium Peirce is separating the materiality of the sign from the functionality it had

enjoyed previously; the sign has been 'de-reified', so to speak, from the monolithic status it had in 1903, no doubt as a result of Peirce's having defined six correlates of sign-action from 1904 on as opposed to the three from the period before. In other words, defining the sign as a medium frees it from the danger of the reification inherent in negligently classifying signs as icons or dicisigns, for example, for these are simply subdivisions.

The role of the utterer in 1906

In this same 1906 draft, true to the principle that psychological considerations have no place in logic, Peirce minimizes the influence of utterer and interpreter on the structure of the sign by invoking instead, as mentioned earlier, the very much more abstract concept of the quasi-mind he had introduced earlier in the draft. Quasi-minds – 'theatres of consciousness' as he puts it in 1907 (EP2 403) – are the indispensable agents of any semiosis since without them there wouldn't be a sign in the first place;^[24] the commens itself being the most general 'mind' of all, the guarantor of every semiosis: 'A sign is supposed to have an object or meaning, and also to determine an interpretant sign of the same object. It is convenient to speak as if the sign originated with an utterer and determined its interpretant in the mind of an interpreter' (R11 1, 1903). Logically, however, neither utterer nor interpreter has any influence on the sign's structure: it is the object which, in an older sense of the term, 'informs' the sign, moulding its structure in the process of semiosis.

Moreover, while it is obvious that for logical reasons and for reasons of commodity Peirce's examples are generally verbocentric, this is not the motivation behind his choice of the term 'utterer' as the first of the two quasi-minds. Consider this from the manuscript: 'To signify that a person puts forth a sign whether vocal, ocular, or by touch, —and conventional signs mostly are of one or other of these three kinds or by taste, smell, and a sense of temperature which are the media of many natural tests and symptoms, —I like the word utter' (R793 14, 1906). Any artist, like the one in [Figure 2.2](#), as an incarnation of Peirce's utterer, is necessarily 'outside' the determination process; he is what for Aristotle was the 'efficient' cause: difficult as it may be for us to admit, according to Peirce's conception of the sign as medium in 1906 it is the dynamic object which structures the representation on the sign, not the artist.^[25]

The three interpretants

After having introduced the dynamic (Peirce's term is 'dynamical', but for convenience the terminology has been standardized) and immediate objects and the sign itself, Peirce goes on to complete the description of the process by describing the three interpretants as follows:

There is the Intentional Interpretant, which is a determination of the mind of the utterer; the Effectual Interpretant, which is a determination of the mind of the interpreter; and the Communicational Interpretant, or say the Cominterpretant, which is a determination of that mind into which the minds of utterer and interpreter have to be fused in order that any communication should take place. This mind may be called the commens. It consists of all that is, and must be, well understood between utterer and interpreter, at the outset, in order that the sign in question should fulfill its function. (RL463 29, 1906)^[26]

In view of the fact that the interpretants are presented in the order of intentional, effectual and communicational, and that the communication of the form is from object to interpretant via the sign, the relations between the correlates as described in 1906 can be represented in the scheme in [Figure 2.3](#), in which the arrow '→' indicates that in the order of determination the correlate preceding determines the one following, which, it must be understood, has been reconstructed from the material in the draft:

Figure 2.3. Hypothetical reconstruction of the hexad in the 1906 draft

|Od → Oi → S → intentional-I → effectual-I → communicational-I|

Now the distinctions Peirce draws between the three interpretants are important for a number of reasons. To begin with, the logical disjunction between the intentional (i.e. immediate) interpretant as a determination of the mind of the utterer and the effectual (i.e. dynamic) interpretant as a determination of the mind of the interpreter is highly significant as it introduces what we might call an interpretive 'differential'. Not only does the 1906 draft confine the sign's structure to the objective nature of semiosis, but it also explains how signs can produce an effect or reaction which diverges from the one intended: if the two agencies or theatres of consciousness involved in the communication have widely differing experiences of the world, then the non-deterministic basis of Peirce's semiotic theory explains those cases where the effectual interpretant is not congruent with the intentional. This latter distinction accords with an initially surprising remark made in a discussion of the symbol by Peirce in the letter to Lady Welby of October 1904, to the effect that the interpretant is a determination of the 'field of the interpretant': 'I define a Symbol as a sign which is determined by its dynamic object only in the sense that it will be so interpreted. It thus depends either upon a convention, a habit, or a natural disposition of its interpretant or of the field of its interpretant (that of which the interpretant is a determination)' (CP 8.335).

In the verbal example (2.1) given above the addressee might signal surprise or commiseration by an appropriate facial expression or verbally thank the utterer for having made the remark, but might equally reply with an irritated Nonsense! or So what? These are all valid perceivable effectual interpretants, but only the first two would be congruent with the spirit of the utterance. Peirce had clearly found the need to account for the fact that interpreters interpret signs differentially, each according to their experience of the world. The field of the interpretant was a logical concept that accounted for this interpretative differential and reinforced the logical validity of an autonomous effectual interpretant. Moreover, the fact that interpreters can, and often do, dispute the event or situation represented by the utterance is proof of the viability of the 'commens': the sign has been interpreted, proving that the communicative process associating utterer and interpreter has functioned correctly in spite of any disagreement.

Finally, one further very significant consequence of the definition of the interpretants in this passage is that Peirce has broken with the more general description of the single interpretant of the 1903 system and, having defined three distinct interpretants, has assigned a specific function to each. Such a move is more than a simple attempt to characterize and name the three interpretants, it is a theoretical anticipation for the hexad of 1908, in which each as a 'subject' of semiosis can be associated with one or other of the three universes. This is a logical necessity as in 1908 the sign has to be classified according to the universes to which it, the two objects and the three interpretants happen to belong, evidence of the extreme theoretical tension to which the status of the interpretant in the original Sign-Interpretant branch of the grand logic was subjected after Peirce had first envisaged it forty years earlier: not only do we have three interpretants but the commens draft actually ascribes a specific position in the sequence and recognizable function to each.

Table 2.4. The typology of 31 March 1906

	31 March 1906	Provisional	Classification of Signs	275r	(H521)
A Sign is					
in its own Nature					
6	5 is either	A Tone	A Token	or A Type	
		What has all its being whether it exists or not	Whose being exists in dyadic relations	whose being exists in the order of whatever may come hereafter to be or in the order that will be shown whenever certain kinds of action shall take place	
in reference to its Immediate Object					
8	6 is either	Indefinite	Singular	or General Sign	*
in reference to the Nature of its Real Object					
7	5 ^{1/2} ? is either	Abstract	Concrete	or Collective	*
in reference to its relation to the Real Object					
9	7 is either	Icon	Index	or Symbol	*
in reference to its Intended Interpretant (1906 August 30 Transpose first & third)					
5	4 is either	Positive	Imperative	or Interrogative	
in reference to the Nature of its Dynamic Interpretant					
	4 is either	Poetic	Stimulant	or Impressive	
		or excitant of feeling Eidoseme	or excitant of action Ergoseme	or determinant of a Habit Logoseme	
in reference to its relation to its Dynamic Interpretant					
	3 is either	Sympathetic	Compulsive	or Rational	
in reference to the Nature of its Normal Interpretant					
	2 is either	Strange	Common	or Novel	
in reference to the Passion of its Normal Interpretant					
	4 is either	Substitute	Suggestive	or Argument	
		Suggestive	Reactive		

31 March 1906	Provisional	Classification of Signs	275r	(H521)
in reference to the Significance of its Normal Interpretant				
1 is either	Monadic	Dyadic	Triadic	??

To complete the discussion of the theoretical developments in Peirce's theory of the sign in 1906 we examine [Table 2.4](#). There are two major taxonomies in the Logic Notebook for 1906. [Table 2.4](#) displays the one from 1906 which found favour with Peirce as seen in the remarks of 1909 quoted at the beginning of the chapter. Comparing this to [Table 2.1](#) we have a far more sophisticated classification system. There are seven columns on the table. The first is composed of amends where Peirce has hesitated as to which number to attribute to a given trichotomy. The first five entries in column one are therefore corrections while column two displays his original numbering, though what the numbers refer to is a mystery as the trichotomies are displayed down the page in the now regular correlate order.

What theoretical advances are to be found on the table? First, much of the terminology is 'progressive' in the sense that the equivalent terminology of 1903 has been replaced by terms only to be found in the later typologies: for instance, 'tone' (or 'tuone', a blend of 'tone' and 'tune' as Peirce writes on the verso side of the sheet), 'token' and 'type' now stand for the original 'qualisign', 'sinsign' and 'legisign' found in [Tables 2.1](#) and [2.2](#), and these are now defined in terms of their 'being', a term which anticipates the subdividing of the trichotomies with reference to universes as opposed to the categories of 1903. The earlier triad of rheme–dicent–argument is here represented as suggestive–reactive–argument. From another point of view, the third trichotomy anticipates the subdivisions of the Od trichotomy on the hexad of 1908, which will be discussed in the following chapter. Furthermore, the trichotomy concerning the nature of the dynamic interpretant will later be replaced by sympathetic, percussive and usual signs, which are similar to the subdivisions represented here as those of the relation between sign and dynamic interpretant. Finally, the Greek-inspired terms 'eidoseme', 'ergoseme' and 'logoseme' were not employed again although Peirce was later to replace the term 'representamen' by 'logon' in a text of 1911 (R675 39).

Just why Peirce should have included this as the second of the two typologies that he preferred in 1909 relates, presumably, to the sophistication of the table compared to earlier efforts. He has mastered the organization of the independent divisions, is relatively sure of his terminology, even though there are hesitations in the designations of the interpretants. However, that he was not entirely satisfied with the typology in 1906 can be seen from the logical transposition of 'positive' and 'interrogative' in the intended (elsewhere designated as the 'immediate') interpretant, the three asterisks and the two question marks at the bottom of column seven.

1907

1907 is important because Peirce introduces a new range of interpretants and thus paves the way in part for the theoretical innovations of 1908, and also because he is preoccupied by his theory of pragmatism and the need of what he calls in the text a 'logical' interpretant. The disparate sets of texts composing R318 are versions of a projected article on Peirce's conception of pragmatism, an article which was never published (cf. Editors' introduction, EP2 398). Interestingly, unlike his practice in the previous three years, the only classification system he offers in this important manuscript is verbal rather than the more usual tabular arrangement with its ten technical subdivisions. The only set of divisions to be found in the manuscript is that suggested in the passage below. The divisions are not identified as in the tabular versions examined above, although examples of the subdivisions in the divisions themselves enable us to divine an order.

Now how would you define a sign, Reader? I do not ask how the word is ordinarily used. I want such a definition as a zoologist would give of a fish, or a chemist of a fatty body, or of an aromatic body, – an analysis of the essential nature of a sign, if the word is to be used as applicable to everything which the most general science of *sêmei’otic* must regard as its business to study; be it of the nature of a significant quality, or something that once uttered is gone forever, or an enduring pattern, like our sole definite article; whether it professes to stand for a possibility, for a single thing or event, or for a type of things or of truths; whether it is connected with the thing, be it truth or fiction, that it represents, by imitating it, or by being an effect of its object, or by a convention or habit; whether it appeals merely to feeling, like a tone of voice, or to action, or to thought; whether it makes its appeal by sympathy, by emphasis, or by familiarity; whether it is a single word, or a sentence or is Gibbon’s Decline and Fall; whether it is interrogatory, imperative, or assertory; whether it is of the nature of a jest, or is sealed and attested, or relies upon artistic force; and I do not stop here because the varieties of signs are by any means exhausted. Such is the definitum which I seek to fit with a rational, comprehensive, scientific, structural definition, – such as one might give of “loom”, “marriage”, “musical cadence”; aiming, however, let me repeat, less at what the definitum conventionally does mean, than at what it were best, in reason, that it should mean. (R318 585–89)

Most are recognizable from the examples: the first is, of course, the division concerning the sign, the subdivisions being identifiable as tone, token and type (or, according to the earlier nomenclature, qualisign, sinsign and legisign); this is followed by examples of the Oi division and examples suggestive of the S–Od 67 division composed of icon (‘by imitating’), index (‘being the effect of its object’) and symbol (convention or habit). This is followed by li (‘feeling’, ‘action’, ‘thought’), then Id (‘sympathy’, ‘emphasis’, ‘familiarity’). This division is followed by the nature of the final interpretant (word, sentence, whole work) after which there is a break in the conventional order of the interpretants with a return to the division concerning the relation holding between sign and dynamic interpretant (here ‘interrogatory, imperative, or assertory’ as opposed to ‘suggestive/interrogative’, ‘imperative’ and ‘indicative’).^[27] Finally, he introduces a division which is difficult to identify, but he anticipates a remark quoted from the Logic Notebook of 1 November 1909 concerning the fact that the ten outlined are not necessarily definitive, though what the others are we are not told.^[28] The last of the series above is a possible candidate.

The logical interpretant

If the formal classifications are neglected in R318, there is, nevertheless, a set of interpretants which are dealt with quite extensively in the manuscript, and this identifies in order of increasing complexity the emotional, energetic and logical interpretants.^[29] As with some other concepts developed by Peirce – the representamen is a notorious case – this series has caused much debate among commentators, dividing them essentially into three groups, as the following quoted remarks suggest. Since the purpose of this chapter is to follow the evolution of Peirce’s conception of sign-action, the divisions of 1907 and the theoretical discussions they have provoked require attention. Briefly, the problem concerns the relation between this triad of interpretants and the one considered in his final statements on the matter, namely the series described in a letter to Lady Welby identifying the destinate (immediate), the effective (dynamic) and explicit (final) interpretants, the first two of which had already figured in taxonomies examined above, the last being termed ‘signified’, ‘significant’, ‘representative’, ‘normal’ and ‘eventual’. In a letter dated 14 March 1909 he informed his English correspondent that:

My three grades of Interpretant were worked out by reasoning from the definition of a Sign what sort of thing ought to be noticeable and then searching for its appearance. My Immediate Interpretant is implied in the fact that each Sign must have its peculiar Interpretability before it gets any Interpreter. My Dynamical Interpretant is that which is experienced in each act of Interpretation and is different in each from that of any other; and the Final Interpretant is the one interpretive result to which every Interpreter is destined to come if the 68Sign is sufficiently considered. The Immediate Interpretant is an abstraction, consisting in a possibility. The Dynamical Interpretant is a single actual event. The Final Interpretant is that toward which the actual tends (SS 111)

The series immediate–dynamical–final can thus be taken as Peirce’s last word on the subject (he describes them in more or less the same terms in another letter of 14 March 1909, to William James, CP 8.314, where we find ‘dynamical’ for ‘dynamic’ and where the final interpretant is also referred to as the ‘ultimate’), and the problem raised by the series from R318 is whether or not it adumbrates the later or somehow exists as a ‘parallel’ triad. One initial attempt to integrate the 1907 series, emotional, energetic and logical is in [Savan 1988](#), in which the author sees the triplet as realizations of the dynamic interpretant ([1988](#): 55). On the other hand, Short describes the relation between the two in the following manner:

Much of this effort [the introduction of several divisions of object and interpretant] was directed toward providing principles for a sign taxonomy, developed in those same years.

We can see in that taxonomy ... that he needed two quite different trichotomies of interpretant. One, following from the teleological structure of semeiosis, pertains to each sign: the immediate interpretant is a potentiality in which consists the sign’s interpretability; the dynamic interpretant is any interpretant actually formed (from zero to many); and the final interpretant is another potentiality, the ideal interpretant of that sign the interpretative purpose. The other trichotomy is an application of Peirce’s phaneroscopy and distinguishes among signs: an emotional interpretant is a feeling or 1st; an energetic interpretant is an action or 2nd; and a logical interpretant is a 3rd, being a thought or other general sign or a habit formed or modified. An immediate interpretant may be either emotional, energetic, or logical, and so also dynamic and final interpretants may be of any category, actually or potentially. A sign’s final interpretant, for example, is that potential feeling or potential action or potential thought, habit-change, and so on, that would best satisfy the purpose of interpreting that sign. ([2007](#): 178)

For Short, then, the two series exist independently of each other but not in any form of conflict: the final one described in the letter to Lady Welby quoted above is teleological in nature; the second, from R318, is based upon Peirce’s categories. This conception of the two series has been contested, notably by [Lalor \(1997\)](#), a paper which was based upon earlier expositions of Short’s position. Lalor, as the following extract shows, conceives of the two series in terms of subordination and superordination, the one expounded in R318 (1907) being a special case of the later, more general series of 1909. Writing when R318 was still dated as 69a manuscript of 1906, he describes the situation as follows: ‘My thesis is that the emotional/energetic/logical classification is a special case of the immediate/dynamical/final one. More specifically, the 1906 trichotomy reflects the concrete human case, the human experience of semeiosis, while the 1909 trichotomy is more abstract and lends itself to a characterization of semiotics generally’ ([1997](#): 34–35). For Lalor, then, the classification of the interpretants as emotional, energetic and logical reflects an anthropomorphic way of looking at semeiosis, while the later one lays down a general structural pattern which includes the former ([1997](#): 35).

Finally, [Bergman \(2009\)](#) adopts what can be seen as a conciliatory position: both series are held to be realizations of a more general, formal series based, as Short has it, on the categories: the macro-level with its immediate–dynamical–final series makes available a formal ‘format’ susceptible of various realizations, while the emotional–energetic–logical series reflects Lalor’s ‘anthropomorphic way of looking at semeiosis’:

Instead of arguing that the more general of the divisions of interpretant identified by Peirce is the genus, both trichotomies may be seen as special cases of a formal triad of first, second, and third interpretant ... Consequently, the immediate-dynamical-final division may be seen as a description of the macro-level of sign action, while the emotional-energetic-logical division primarily characterizes the concrete field of human interpretation. ([2009](#): 123–24)

Judging by the wealth of contributions to the issue (only three of which have been quoted above, but there are many others), this is clearly a matter of considerable philosophical interest, but for a semiotician these distinctions are difficult to admit. It doesn’t seem logical to imagine that in a single process of semeiosis there should be available two distinct series of interpretants, as the extract from [Short 2007](#) seems to suggest, or in the other cases as a choice between one based on the categories and the other based upon some teleological realization of a higher,

more abstract formal interpretant system. Interpretants can only be 'generated', so to speak, by a sign, itself determined by two objects: for a given semiosis, there can be only one series of interpretants, not two in parallel or two in succession. Moreover, the idea of human semiosis alone involving the emotional–energetic–logical triad is reminiscent of the remark that Peirce makes concerning the difference between sign and representamen, namely that 'A Sign is a Representamen with a mental Interpretant. Possibly there may be Representamens that are not Signs' (CP 2.274, 1903). There is another way of looking at the series from R318, one which corresponds to the purpose of this chapter.

Consider, first, the context in which the series occurs. As mentioned above, the texts composing R318 are versions of an article on Peirce's conception of pragmatism. Peirce defines it thus: 'Suffice it to say once more that pragmatism is, in itself, no doctrine of metaphysics, no attempt to determine any truth of things. It is merely a method of ascertaining the meanings of hard words and of abstract concepts' (R318 15). Second, as far as I have been able to ascertain, R318 is the only text in which this particular interpretant series occurs: the logical interpretant, which has engendered most discussion, is a 'local' and chronologically limited concept, and there is no reason not to suppose that, as this chapter seeks to demonstrate, like the other series examined above, this one is part of Peirce's evolving conception of the interpretant which results in the triad of 1909. This hypothesis can be substantiated by an examination of this long extract from one of the (often disparate) variants to be found in R318 (it corresponds roughly to CP 5.475):

But all logicians have distinguished two objects of a sign; the one, the Immediate object or object as the sign represents it, (and without this sign would not be a sign); the other Real object, or object as it is independent of any particular idea representing it. Of course, many signs have no real objects. We turn to the interpretant, to see whether there is any corresponding distinction; and we find that in place of two, there are three different interpretants. First, there is the "emotional interpretant", which consists in a feeling, or rather in the quality of a feeling. It is sometimes formed into an image, yet is more usually merely a feeling which causes the interpreter of the sign to believe he recognizes of [sic] the import and intention of the sign. A concerted piece of music, for example, brings a succession of musical emotions answering to those of the composer. This is an extreme case; usually the emotional interpretant consists merely in a sense, more or less complex, perhaps amounting to an image, perhaps not, of the meaning of the sign. All signs whatsoever must, in order to fulfill their functions as signs, first of all produce such emotional interpretants. Next, many signs bring about actual events. The infantry officer's word of command "Ground arms!" produces as its existential interpretant, (the sign having been first apprehended in an "emotional interpretant",) the slamming down of the musket-butts. The less thought intervenes between the apprehension and this act, the better the sign fulfills its function. All signs that are not to evaporate in mere feelings must have such an existential interpretant, or as I might perhaps better have called it, such an energetic interpretant. These two interpretants correspond to the two objects of a sign. The emotional interpretant, immediately produced by the sign, corresponds to the immediate object. The existential, or energetic, interpretant, corresponds to the real object whose action is obscurely and indirectly the active cause of the sign. But now there is a third interpretant, to which no object of the sign corresponds. It is what we commonly call the meaning of the sign; but I call it the logical interpretant, or logical meaning the sign. Obviously, there is such an interpretant; for the definition of the term aims to give it; and every vigorous mind feels that such a definition, though aiming at the thing, hardly hits the bull's-eye. In rare cases it may; but as a general rule, it hits the target, but not the bull's-eye. (R318 373–79)

Here Peirce first defines the two objects, designated as 'Immediate' and 'Real'. He then turns to the interpretants, identifying them in turn as the emotional, the existential or energetic and, finally, the logical. In the course of this description he establishes correspondences between the emotional interpretant and the immediate object, and between the energetic interpretant and the real object. This in itself is surprising as it suggests that a piece of concerted music – or an air played on a guitar, another example Peirce gives – has no real object, only an immediate one, and can only produce or generate an immediate interpretant in the form of a feeling, whence, in 1907, the term 'emotional' interpretant. Similarly, commands such as the well-known 'Ground arms!' example are determined by a 'real' object and determine both an emotional and an energetic interpretant, in this case the slamming-down of the musket butts. At this point, as was no-

ted earlier in the chapter, he introduces the even more surprising notion that there is a third interpretant 'to which no object of the sign corresponds': concepts have no object but determine all three interpretants. This is surely evidence that Peirce was still feeling his way through the problem of the interpretant sequence that he had introduced at least three years earlier, and that his thoughts on the problem were far from complete: he realized that a concept couldn't have an existent object but, rather a class, and he presumably began to think in terms of necessitant objects. In the case of the logical interpretant his explanation is as follows: 'Of what kind are signs which determine "logical interpretants"? They are exclusively such as embody and convey thought proper, whether in the form of the concept, or in that of the meaning of a proposition, or in that of the force of a reason, or argument' (R318 385–87). At this time, then, Peirce was restricting the third interpretant, whether we call it signified, representative or logical, to determination by thought, a type of sign which determined all three types of interpretant. The resultant hierarchical relations between object, sign and interpretant as conceived by Peirce in at least one variant of the intended article are set out according to [Table 2.5](#), in which concepts and intellectual thoughts are shown not to have an object at all.

Table 2.5. A tabular summary of objects, signs and interpretants from R318

Object	Sign	Interpretant
	Intellectual concept, thought	Logical
		Energetic
		Emotional
Real	The command 'Ground arms!'	Energetic
		Emotional
Immediate	Concerted piece of music	Emotional

What, if the explanation above is to be accepted, do we make of the 'ultimate' logical interpretant? This was, after all, an attempt to prove his version of pragmatism: 'Moreover, since pragmatism, in my view, relates to intellectual concepts exclusively, and since these are all general, the mental element we seek must be general. The principal general constituents of the mind are desires and habits' (R318 409). The only possible conclusion to any sequence of interpretants of the logical type is a habit or change in existing habits, and this is the role Peirce attributed at this time to what he conceived as the ultimate logical interpretant:

Shall we say that this effect may be a thought, that is to say, a mental sign? No doubt, it may be so; only, if this sign be of an intellectual kind – as it would have to be – it must itself have a logical interpretant; so that it cannot be the ultimate logical interpretant of the concept. It can be proved that the only mental effect that can be so produced and that is not a sign but is of a general application is a habit-change; meaning by a habit-change a modification of a person's tendencies toward action, resulting from previous experiences or from previous exertions of his will or acts, or from a complexus of both kinds of cause. (R318 67–69)

This is not, however, Peirce's final word on the interpretants, and as suggested earlier, these concepts are not found elsewhere either in an earlier or later text. They were the bases of his attempt to prove his pragmatism but belong, with the others from previous taxonomies, to this transitional period between 1903 and 1908.

Summary and conclusions

The sign is defined no longer as a form of representation 'standing for' something else as a substitute. In 1906 Peirce breaks with the earlier conception of the sign and now defines it as a mediating agency between the objects and the interpretant sequence which they mediately determine. As a consequence, it is the object which occupies the semiotic centre of influence, so to speak. The only thing which can be communicated to the interpretants from the dynamic object via the sign is the qualitative entity, form: were the influence of the object an existent of some sort, it would no longer remain in the object once it had been communicated to the sign – a semiotic impossibility. Form is thus the only structured entity which can be embodied simultaneously in objects, sign and interpretants. His temporary rejection of the concept of the representamen in 1905 is perhaps indicative of this movement from representation to mediation.

Within the various classifications discussed above and others in R339, the order of determination is that of the triadic relations established in 1903. In the first two hexadic taxonomies, we have S, Od, Oi, If, Id, Ii. After intensive work on the classifications between 8 October and 13 October in 1905 Peirce increased the number of divisions from six to ten, albeit with varying names for, principally, what is elsewhere in this study referred to as the Final Interpretant, and altered the ordering of the six correlates to S, Oi, Od, Ii, Id, If.

Of the three interpretants, the final is the most unstable over this period, being referred to as the signified (1903, 1904); the significant and the representative (1905); and the normal, eventual,^[30] communicative and habitual (1906).^[31] However, as seen above, this series terminates with the problematic and much disputed 'logical' interpretant with which Peirce sought to prove his version of pragmatism by means of his logic in 1907. We note, too, that he develops the idea, already present in 1903 and earlier, that the interpretant is a sign – see the terminology used for the final interpretant throughout the series. We end this long chapter with a quote from [Short 2004](#):

The fundamental revolution in doctrine that occurred in 1907 was to have recognised that it is the habit itself, and not a concept of it, that is the interpretant (more precisely, the ultimate logical interpretant) of a concept. Verbal interpretants and verbal definitions, Peirce then said, are "very inferior to the living definition that grows up in the habit."

The revolution of 1907 is, then, a revolution in Peirce's pragmatism as well as in his semeiotic. In both, it is a step away from a too extreme intellectualism. 1907 is also the year when Peirce first drew his pragmatism and his semeiotic together into one formulation. (2004: 228)

I prefer to think that the real revolution occurred the following year, when Peirce breaks completely with the philosophical tradition described in [Chapter 1](#), and it is to this revolution that we turn in the chapter to follow.⁷⁴

^[3] Short (2007: 191), suggests that the two objects have their origin in the work of the Stoics. Cf. 'It will do no harm to note here that philosophists are in the habit of distinguishing two objects of many signs, the immediate and the real. The former is an image, or notion, which the interpreter is supposed to have already formed in his mind before the sign is uttered.' (R318 399–401, 1907)

^[27] See the table for August 31, 1906, in the Appendix.