Introduction: Peirce’s extended theory and classifications of signs

It is well known that Peirce’s theory of signs went into a phase of decisive development around the turn of the century. In the *Minute Logic* of 1902, a new principle was introduced. Until then, Peirce’s main terminological toolbox was the triadic distinction of signs after their object reference, *icon-index-symbol*, and the other important distinction, that of *term-proposition-argument*, was most often seen as a subdivision of symbols. Now, Peirce realized that such distinctions did not simply refer to kinds of signs, but rather to kinds of *sign aspects*, and that, in order to reach kinds of signs, the different triads of sign aspects should be combined. During the elaboration of the 1903 *Syllabus*, arguably the most-quoted source of Peirce sign definitions, he went from the combination of two to three triads, now adding *qualisign-sinsign-legisign* to the two trichotomies mentioned. It is also well known how the three trichotomies of sign aspects do not combine freely (which would give $3 \times 3 \times 3 = 27$ sign types). A more restricted principle of combination gave rise to 10 sign types, famously presented as a conclusion of the *Syllabus*.\(^1\) In a certain sense, this result—the three trichotomies of sign aspects and the 10 combined sign types—stand out as the stable, classical version of Peirce’s semiotics.

\(^1\)The combination principle depends on two ordering sequences: in each trichotomy, the sign aspects are ordered 1–2–3 after Peirce’s three categories, and the trichotomies, in turn, are ordered based on the sign-object-interpretant sequence in the sign definition (so that Qualisign-Sinsign-Legisign is first, Icon-Index-Symbol is second, and Rheme-Dicisign-Argument is third). Based on these two sequences, a certain combination of sign aspects is possible if the number of the element from the first trichotomy $\geq$ the number of the element from the second $\geq$ the number of the element from the third. Adding new trichotomies, then, it is important in order to generalize this schema, that they be sequentially ordered after some principle extending the sign-object-interpretant sequence. Peirce chose his extended division of objects and interprets for that purpose (immediate versus dynamic object; immediate, dynamic, versus final interpretant), so that trichotomies were defined after which of these they address in which way. We cannot go further into these issues here; some of the papers of this special issue go into the details of this discussion.

*Corresponding author: João Queiroz, Federal University of Juiz de Fora, Juiz de Fora, Brazil, E-mail: queirozj@gmail.com
Frederik Stjernfelt, Aalborg University, Aalborg, Denmark, E-mail: stjern@hum.aau.dk
Peirce, however, did not conceive of this result as final. He never revised the *Syllabus* result, the three trichotomies and their combination – he rather saw it as an established achievement to be taken as a basis for further elaboration. Thus, the last 10 active years of Peirce’s life saw an impressive amount of further semiotic developments: his doctrine of diagrams and diagrammatical reasoning, the introduction of speech acts and other semiotic issues in the theoretical underpinnings of his development of the Existential Graph (EG) notation of logic, as well as the tentative extension of the 1903 doctrine by means of the addition of further trichotomies to enter the combinatory scheme of the *Syllabus*. The latter – which can be seen as the taxonomic underpinnings of the semiotic developments taking place in Peirce’s simultaneous development of the diagram system of the EGs – gave rise to vastly extended taxonomies. First to a version based on 6 trichotomies of sign aspects resulting – by the same combination calculus as developed in the *Syllabus* – in 28 classes of signs, and, a bit later, ten trichotomies resulting in no less than 66 combined classes of signs. Important sources of these ideas include Peirce’s last series of *Monist* papers and Peirce’s letters to Lady Welby, but also many papers and notes scattered in Peirce’s *Nachlass* at the Houghton Library.

Few semioticians, however, have approached the intricacies of Peirce’s mature semiotic drafts, including Peirce’s extended typologies of signs (28 and 66 classes of signs), developed from 1903, many parts of which still seem unfinished, obscure, structurally intricate, and not evident how to apply to empirical phenomena. The importance of the many issues addressed and coming together in this classification, however, must be emphasized.

This special issue aims to promote a better understanding of Peirce’s final ten years of semiotic developments, centered around the problems and vistas opened by the extended classifications of signs. Researchers from diverse fields have been invited to contribute to this issue, and it is with great pleasure we are able to present a very distinguished array of Peirce scholars deepening our understanding of Peirce’s final semiotic ideas and results as well as developing their actual possibilities for semiotic theory and analyses.