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Peircean Cognitive Semiotics (Theme Session)

Peirce declared inference to be “the essential function of the cognitive mind” and at the same time the “paramount semiotic relation” (MS 787, CP 2.444), for any reasoning consists in interpreting signs (MS 283, 637, 654). Not only is reasoning a sign *formaliter*, or in its essence and form; it is also a sign *materialiter*, or in its existence and expression. *Formaliter*, all thinking is iconic and consists in the transformation of symbols into other symbols by means of icons (MS 293, MS 339, 1906). This was, at bottom, Kant’s doctrine: in order to be made object of thinking, a concept must be constructed or schematized *either* in pure imagination *or* on paper, where the “either...or” operates as *parity principle* and qualifies Kant as an extended mind scientist *ante litteram*. Peirce went further than Kant, and claimed that *since* all thinking is in signs (*formaliter*), *then* the royal way to a cognitive semiotics is to conceive the mind as consisting in its external manifestations (*materialiter*) (MS 292, MS 637). Not only is the science of thinking best considered as a study of signs (MS L 75); it is also best conducted as a study of *external* signs.

The theme session here proposed will discuss the relevance of Peirce’s semiotic ideas for contemporary cognitive semiotics. Caravà argues that both first- and second-generation cognitive science entertain a too narrow conception of representation, and that Peirce’s own broader semiotic notion can contribute to overcome the limitations of both approaches. Cristalli investigates the relationships between Peirce’s researches in logic and his interests in statistics and experimental psychology, and argues that cognitive semiotics is the theoretical framework within which psychology (perception) and logic (inference) can be reconciled. Bellucci discusses some recent applications of the Extended Mind hypothesis to the study of logical and mathematical languages, and examines the merit and the demerits of this approach from a Peircean point of view. The aim of the session is to provide arguments and analyses in support of the thesis that Peirce’s semiotics is the most appropriate theoretical framework for the study of cognitive processes.