Introduction to Peircean Visual Semiotics
Semiotics has complemented linguistics by expanding its scope beyond the phoneme and the sentence to include texts and discourse, and their rhetorical, performative, and ideological functions. It has brought into focus the multimodality of human communication. Bloomsbury Advances in Semiotics publishes original works in the field demonstrating robust scholarship, intellectual creativity, and clarity of exposition. These works apply semiotic approaches to linguistics and nonverbal productions, social institutions and discourses, embodied cognition and communication, and the new virtual realities that have been ushered in by the Internet. It also is inclusive of publications in relevant domains such as socio-semiotics, evolutionary semiotics, game theory, cultural and literary studies, human–computer interactions, and the challenging new dimensions of human networking afforded by social websites.

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Introduction to Peircean Visual Semiotics

TONY JAPPY
In memoriam Gérard Deledalle, Ficino of the twentieth century
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INTRODUCTION

Ours, we are frequently told, is a visual culture, a culture which has witnessed enormous growth in the devising and deployment of vision-based technology; a culture in which, increasingly, information is deserting the traditional print media and is coming more and more to be framed in screens of various sorts. It is at the same time a culture fraught with anxieties over the passage from analogue to digital imaging technology which, it has been claimed, is threatening to transform our everyday reality into a flood of simulations, while the CCTV camera impinges on and violates our privacy and civil liberties. It is a culture, finally, in which ancient suspicions of analogy, reality and the image are fostered and reinforced by a very modern theory of the sign.

It is almost a paradox, then, that although the visual embodiment of this culture is all around us, entrenched, as it were, in our communal experience, we seem unable to assimilate it without careful thought and instruction, and a quick search through the online bookstores nets literally hundreds of more or less academically oriented studies in theory and methodology – textbooks, guides, anthologies, surveys, readers – devoted to the complex interplay of vision, images and culture. Now the interesting feature of this twenty-first-century abundance is that the theoretical bases of these texts are to be found in two theories of the sign which were developed contemporaneously at the beginning of the last century. And they are entirely incompatible.

The zoologists and the hunters

Writing in 1981, the literary critic Jonathan Culler offered the following perception of the two major contemporary semiotic research activities associated with Peirce’s American ‘semeiotic’, on the one hand, and with the European semiology of Ferdinand de Saussure, on the other:

Semiotics, which defines itself as the science of signs, posits a zoological pursuit: the semiotician wants to discover what are the species of signs, how they differ from one another, how they function in their native habitat, how they interact with other species. Confronted with the