Sign

The easiest of those which are of philosophical interest is the idea of a sign, or representation. A sign stands for something to the idea which it produces, or modifies. Or, it is a vehicle conveying into the mind something from without. That for which it stands is called its Object; that which it conveys, its Meaning; and the idea to which it gives rise, its Interpretant. The object of representation can be nothing but a representation of which the first representation is the interpretant. But an endless series of representations, each representing the one behind it, may be conceived to have an absolute object at its limit. The meaning of a representation can be nothing but a representation. In fact, it is nothing but the representation itself conceived as stripped of irrelevant clothing. But this clothing never can be completely stripped off; it is only changed for something more diaphanous. So there is an infinite regression here. Finally, the interpretant is nothing but another representation to which the torch of truth is handed along; and as representation, it has its interpretant again. Lo, another infinite series.


References: NEM 4:309-10; CP 1.339

Date of Quote: 1893-5 [c.]
The easiest of those which are of philosophical interest is the idea of a sign, or representation. A sign stands for something to the idea which it represents, or modifies. Or, it conveys something to the mind, something from without. That which it stands for is called its object; that which it conveys, its meaning, and the idea to which it gives rise, its interpretant. The object of a representation can be nothing but a representation of which the first representation is the interpretant. But an endless series of representations, each representing the one which it may be conceived to have an absolute object at its limit. The meaning of a representation can be nothing but a representation. In fact, it is nothing but the representation itself conceived as stripped of its complete clothing. But this clothing never can be completely stripped off; it is only changed for something more abstract and more primitive. So there is an infinite regression here, too. Finally, the interpretant is nothing but another representation, and as representation, it has its interpretant again. This, another infinite series...