

'Symbol' (pub. 13.01.15-11:15). Quote in M. Bergman & S. Paavola (Eds.), *The Commens Dictionary: Peirce's Terms in His Own Words. New Edition*. Retrieved from <http://www.commens.org/dictionary/entry/quote-logical-tracts-no-1-existential-graphs-6>.

Term: Symbol

Quote: A *symbol* is a representamen whose representative force depends on how it is interpreted.

This sounds like nonsense; for what else is the interpretative force of a representation but its interpretation? But an example will at once show what is meant. The word "man" has the meaning it has simply by virtue of there being a general law, or habit, among English speaking interpreters, to which the interpretations of it will conform. Not only is "man" a "general sign" *formaliter*, or in its signification, but it is also general *materialiter*, in its mode of being as a sign. It is certainly not an existent individual. [—] Still less is it an appearance, flitting through the mind, and gone forever. It is evidently of the nature of a habit; not in the physiological sense (if there be any), but in the sense of a *law* to which not merely all interpretations so far have conformed but to which coming interpretations are really influenced to conform. In short, it is a real general. All modern philosophers teach that generals are "mere" words, or "mere" conceptions, or "mere" symbols of some kind; although they are quite beyond comparison the most important things there are. However this may be, if generals are symbols, no doubt symbols are all generals.

Source: Peirce, C. S. (1903 [c.]). *Logical Tracts. No. 1. On Existential Graphs*. MS [R] 491.

References: MS [R] 491:6-7

Date of 1903 [c.]

Quote:

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