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Division of signs

Charles S. Peirce

Transcribed by Ahti-Veikko Pietarinen¹

Abstract. Hereby we publish five (previously unpublished) excerpts from Charles S. Peirce's manuscripts – one from the *Prescott Book* (MS 277, 1909) and four from the *Logic Notebook* (MS 339, October 1905–March 1906, 1909). These concern the problems of classification of signs.

Keywords: classification of signs, tuone, token, type, potentive, interrogative, ejaculative, desiderative, imperative, significative, eidoseme, ergoseme, logoseme, interpretant

Headnote. Peirce's lifelong project to define, classify and analyse signs has bred a century of interpretations. Those interpretations have been rife with truths, half-truths, one-and-the-half-truths and outright misdemeanours. Much of the trouble, imprecision and confusion, it is fair to say, has been caused by the unavailability of those key writings that concern divisions that have the most value. At the same time, there has been disproportionate emphasis on outcroppings that have been available for long time but which, even on Peirce's own account, were superseded by increasingly better expositions.

As far as his late analyses of signs are concerned, Peirce took his most valuable classificatory attempts to be those that he drafted only over a couple of months in late 1905 and early 1906. Most of them are found in the *Logic Notebook* in a dreadfully untidy condition. These attempts have never been published before and are hardly ever referred to in the secondary literature. Yet they sparked off perhaps the most productive phase of his thought. His remarks from those months suggest quite novel and surprising perspectives that were to benefit his later work in semeiotic.

What the reader will find below is only a teaser to illustrate the magnitude of those perspectives. Despite appearances, we do not have merely someone obsessed with inventing increasingly unintelligible euphemisms to denote various signs. There is an orderly scientific mind that struggles to picture and communicate that rich and diverse landscape of signs – not unlike what one might envision on a new exoplanet – on which semeiotic analyses could then fearlessly proceed on their course.

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Our selection is based on Peirce's own designations that come from the likewise unpublished *Prescott Book* (MS 277) of late 1909. The value of Peirce's remarks in this opening selection is that they point out which among dozens of other similar drafts and frustrated attempts could redeem the still-to-date largely unfulfilled promise to bring together the logical, conceptual, cognitive and epistemological workings of signs. This "pioneer, or rather a backwoodsman", who half a century earlier had embarked on doing precisely that in his early papers, is drawn to conclude the notebook with the sentence: "Let it be admitted then that no act of thinking can involve thinking about that very act of thinking."

Are there signs that can represent themselves? And if there are, can they do that in a complete manner or do the paradoxes or self-reference and knowledge, failure of the KK-thesis, logical omniscience, implicit knowledge (unawareness), temporality of events, incompleteness, or meta-semeiotic or meta-linguistic facts of the matter thwart the enterprise? Do we for these reasons need a classification that organizes signs in ranks and structures with neat subordination and elaborate inferential relations? Let the knowledgeable decide, but one thing is certain: Peirce's division of signs is full of surprises that we are only beginning to unravel.

Logic Notebook (MS 339), November 1, 1909 [360r].² During the last three years I have been resting from my work on the Division of Signs and have only lately – in the last week or two been turning back to it; and I find my work of 1905 better than any since that time, though the latter doubtless has value and must not be passed by without consideration.

Looking over the book labelled in red "The Prescott Book", and also this one, I find the entries in this book of "Provisional Classification of 1906 March 31" [275r, **Appendix A**] and of 1905 Oct 13 [262r, **Appendix B**] particularly important from my present (accidentally limited, no doubt) point of view; particularly in regard to the point made in the Prescott Book 1909 Oct 28 and what immediately preceded that in that book but is not dated [**Appendix C**].

Namely, a good deal of my early attempts to define the difference between Icon, Index, and Symbol, were adulterated with confusion with the distinction as to the Reference of the Dynamic Interpretant to the Sign.

The amount of labour still required upon the ten trichotomies of signs (and more than these ten I don't inquire into, not because I don't think they are in truth there, but simply because it will be all I possibly can do to *define* and to *prove* these ten) is enough of itself to occupy the $10\pm$ years of efficient thinking that may remain to me if no accident cuts them short.

The light which the two trichotomies referred to in the last paragraph but one above throws upon each other suggests a mode method of study that I have hitherto

² The numbers in the square brackets refer to the *Logic Notebook* pagination later added to it. Editorial interventions in this diplomatic transcription are denoted by italized square brackets []. The title of the selection has been provided by the transcriber.

employed only in getting as clear ideas as I have (and they ought to be more definite) of the first and second trichotomies or [using the excellent notation of 1905 Oct 12 [**Appendix D**]] A and Ba. I am now employing applying the same method to Bb β and Cb β . It ought to be applied not merely to A and Ba but further to A, Ba, and Ca taken together. Also to A Ba Bba to A Ba Cba to Bba Cba. Then to A B β Cc γ etc. to Ba Bba Cca to A Bba Cca etc.

[361r] A "Sign" is an Ens (i.e. something, and it may be of any category of being) which, in addition to not only has a capacity of being either imagined, perceived, or conceived, as anything of the same category of Being of which one has sufficient happens to have enough of the right kind of dealings may be but also has the property of producing in a mind which perceives it and which has skill, or practical un through upon a person who fulfills in whom certain conditions are fulfilled effects that another thing or a collection of other things would fulfill produce, those conditions being the possession by that person of a practical understanding of the system of correspondence.

But this definition ought to be prefaced with the remark that no know event of cognition event of learning anything brings per se any other knowledge than its content that which it has in learning; and in particular does not include any knowledge about that event of learning itself. Thus seeing does (not) include a sight of the eye or any knowledge about the learning itself. True, Hamilton and others insist that to know includes the knower's knowing that he knows; and in the limited sense in which he here used the word know, one must admit that something is true which those words seem to express. Nevertheless, merely knowing a fact does not include the knowledge that that very act *per se* includes any knowledge about itself, any more than seeing includes any vision of the event of sight itself. When one first comes to assent to this truth that in any solid that has no hole through it nor any hole enclosed in it, the number of edges is less by two than the sum of the numbers of its distinct surfaces and of summits (supposing everyone of the former is bounded has an edge all round it by three or more edges and that every one of the latter simply extends from one summit to another), he is thinking his thought is exclusively occupied with the solid and its parts, and he is not thinking at all of himself or his knowledge. And if Hamilton does not call an assent, however unqualified and confident, by the name of "knowledge" unless it be accompanied by a recognition of its acceptance by the knower, then it is undoubtedly true that to know is to know that one knows that which one knows, but it still remains false that to know is to know that one knows that one knows one's knowledge of the former knowing that one knows it, in the sense of actively thinking it, though one undoubtedly has what the scholastics call an habitual knowledge of it, that is to say a disposition to accept it as soon as the question occurs to the person supposed.

Let it be admitted then that no act of thinking can involve thinking about that very act of thinking. *[End of the Logic Notebook]*

APPENDIX A. Excerpts from the Logic Notebook (MS 339)

1906 March 31 [275r]. Provisional Classification of Signs.

		A Sign is	
	in its own nature		
is either	A Tone which has all its beings whether it exists or not	A Token whose being consists in dyadic relations	or A Type where being consists of the order of whatever may come hereafter to be or in the order that will be shown whenever certain kinds of action shall take place
	in reference to its Immediate Object		
is either	Indefinite	Singular	or General Sign *
	in reference to the nature of its Real Object		
is either	Abstract	Concrete	or Collective *
	in reference to its relation to its Real Object		
is either	Icon	Index	or Symbol *
	in reference to its Intended Interpretant (1906 Aug 30 Transpose first and third)		
is either	Ponitive	Imperative	or Interrogatory
	in reference to the nature of its Dynamic Interpretant		
is either	Poetic	Stimulant	or Impressive
	or excitant of feeling	or excitant of Action	or determinant of a Habit
	Eidoseme	Ergoseme	Logoseme
	in reference to its relation to its Dynamic Interpretant		
is either	Sympathetic	Compulsive	or Rational
	in reference to the Nature of its Normal Interpretant		
is either	Strange	Common	or Novel
	in reference to the Passion of its Normal Interpretant		
is either	Substitute Suggestive	Suggestive Assertive	or Argument
	in reference to the Significance of its Normal Interpretant		
is either	Monadic	Dyadic	or Triadic ??

A Sign is

1906 April 2. *Notes on my Provisional Classification of Signs.* I have thought of the Object of a Sign as that which determines the sign; and this is well thought. I have thought of the Interpretant as that which the Sign determines or might determine or should determine, but this is not so well. For my idea of determination is dyadic while the idea of the relation of the interpretant to the sign is triadic.

Say the Interpretant is that which the Sign brings into the correspondence with the Object.

The Object is plainly Twofold. The Dynamic Object is the Real Object according to the above definition. The Immediate Object is the Object as presented in the Sign.

The Interpretant is Threefold. The Normal Interpretant is the Genuine Interpretant, embracing all that the Sign could reveal concerning the Object to a sufficiently penetrating mind, being more than any possible mind, however penetrable, could conclude from it, since there is no end to the distinct conclusions that could be drawn concerning the Object from any Sign. The Dynamic Interpretant is just what is drawn from the Sign by a given Individual Interpreter. The Immediate Interpretant is the interpretant represented, explicitly or implicitly, in the sign itself. I have thus omitted the *intended* interpretant. So far as the intention is betrayed in the Sign, it belongs to the immediate Interpretant. So far as it is not so betrayed, it may be the Interpretant of *another* sign, but it is in no sense the interpretant of *that* sign.

As to the Matter of the Sign itself, it is either a Tuone or a Token or a Type. The word ['Tuone'] is a blend of Tone and Tune. It means a quality of feeling which is significant, whether it be simple, like a Tone or a complex, like a Tune. But the latter is not *pure* feeling. By a Token, I mean an existing thing or an actual historical event which serves as a Sign.

By a Type, I mean a general form which can be repeated indefinitely and is in all its repetitions one and the same sign. Thus the word *the* is a Type. It is likely to occur over a score of times on a page of an English book; but it is only one word twenty times repeated. The distinction between a Type and a Token is obvious. There may be some confusion between the Tuone and the Type. They may, however, be distinguished in various ways. In the first place, [Type] is absolutely identical in all its *instances* or embodiments, while a Tone cannot have any identity, it has only similarity. Thus the sound of any vowel will be slightly different every two times it is pronounced and then so far as it is so, it is two Tuones. But any two vowels in so far as they are alike are the same Tuone, in the only case in which there can be any sameness to a tuone. Anything then that could conceivably be made absolutely definite, bearing in mind that no two things can be exactly alike in any quality whatever, cannot be a Tuone. Another test is that a Tuome (Peirce occasionally misspells Tuone as Tuome) though it may be composed of many ingredients is, like a chemical compound of many elements, perfectly homogenous and structureless in effect, while a Type, though it may be indecomposable, must be more or less complex in its relations. Tests might be multiplied; yet after all, it will often require subtlety to decide whether a given sign is a Tuone or a Type. Take for example a given melody, say the Last Rose of Summer. Considered as to its structure it is a Type; but considered as a whole in its esthetic effect which is not composed of one part due to one note and another to another, it is a Tuome. As ordinarily conceived it is a Tuone, slightly different however every time, it is sure, but from the point of view of contrapoint, it is absolutely the same every time it is rendered so with substantial correctness (though it be a trifle out of tune and time) it is a Type. But any one singing of it is neither Tuone nor Type but a Token. Notwithstanding these difficulties in many cases there is no room for an instant's hesitation, and the distinction is not only useful but practically indispensable.

The immediate object of a sign may be of quite a different nature from the real dynamical object. Let the object really be ever so complex, yet if it is presented without analysis, and in such a way as to have no definite identity, the *Immediate* Object is a simple quality. Thus a substantive with the indefinite article has a simple quality for immediate object. A proper name on the contrary has a well-known existent thing for its object, even if like Othello, it be a fictitious object. But this cannot be the case for an interpreter who has never heard of the thing or to whom the name is new.

[278r] A sign may have for its immediate object a determining course of nature, or habit of things. Thus if I say every President of the United States has been a highminded man, I conceive that the operation of some natural law has made them so. This is a way in which the precise meaning may be expressed; and it is the first rule of logic that in pure thought in whatever way a thing can be accurately conceived in that way it is; because pure thought has no other being than that of representing its object. This is not only the way the matter may be regarded but the way it *must* be regarded subject to an exception I shall mention presently. The reason it must be so regarded is that a sign cannot have two objects. You may represent a pair of things, or a triplet, etc. other collection number, but it will be a single pair, a simple triplet, or a single other collection. So the exception I alluded to is that the sentence (which is in so far ambiguous) may be taken to mean that the succession of Presidents of the U.S. (which succession is a unique object) is a succession uninterrupted of honorable men of certain sentiments. Usually as when we say "All men have two legs" we plainly refer to the nature of men, since some monstrosities reckoned as men have different numbers of legs.

APPENDIX B. Excerpts from the Logic Notebook (MS 339) 1905 Oct 13 [262r].

A. Nature of Sign in Itself

Existent = Sinsign

- Combinant Type = Legisign
- B. Of Object
 - a. Immediate

In what form object is represented in sign {Indef. / Sing. / General As far as affects form of signs

- b. Dynamical
 - a. Nature of Object in Itself
 {Abstraction / Concrete / Collection
 As far as it affects nature of sign

β. Cause of sign being determined to represent Obj. Causation of signs representing Obj

C. Of Interpretant

- a. Immediate
 - How In what form interpretant is repr. in sign {Interrog / Imper. / Significant As far as it affects form of sign
- b. Dynamical
 - α. Nature of Interpretant in Itself
 {Feeling / Fact / Sign
 As far as that affects Nature of sign
 - β. Cause of sign being determined to being represented / to affect Causation of sign affecting Interp.
 {Sympathy / Compulsion / Representat
- c. Representative
 - a. In what form sign is represented in Interpretant As far as this affects form of sign.
 - β. Causation of representation of Sign by Interpretant. As far as this affects the nature of the Sign.
 - y. Rationale of Connection between Sign and Object affected by Interpretant.

APPENDIX C. Excerpts from the Prescott Book (MS 277)

1909 Oct 28. P.M. 6:30. *Another endeavour to analyze a Sign.* A Sign is anything which represents something else (so far as it is complete), and if it represents itself it is as a part of another sign which represents something other than itself, and it represents itself in other *circumstances*, in other connections. A man may talk and he is a sign of what he relates. He may tell about himself as he was at another time. He cannot tell exactly what he is doing at that very moment. Yes, he may confess he is lying, but he must be a false sign, then. A Sign, then, would seem to *profess* to represent something else.

Either a Sign is to be defined as something which *truly* represents something or else as something which *professes* to represent something.

[What follows are the "immediately preceding passages" in the Prescott Book.]

Of the distinction between the Objects, or better the "Originals" and the Interpretant of a Sign.

By A "*Sign*" is meant any Ens which is determined by a single Object or set of Objects, called its Originals, all other than the Sign itself, and in its turn is, capable of determining a Mind, something called its Interpretant, and that in such a way

that the Mind is thereby mediately determined to some mode of conformity to the Original or Set of Originals. This is particularly intended to define (very imperfectly as yet) a Complete Sign. But a Complete Sign has or may have Parts which partake of the nature of their whole; but often in a truncated fashion.

The Interpretant brings a state of things to appear, either in Imagination or in Facts, or in Tendency is the influence exerts upon the mind, Effect upon the mind or Venues that the sign brings to pass, either causing a state of feeling, or an Imagination, or concentrating attention, or it may or may stimulate to action whether external, or an exertion of attention, or it may cause a state of mind of the nature of a disposition or habit.

A sign is in regard to its Interpretant in one or another of three grades of Completeness, which may be called the *Barely Overt*, the *Overter*, and the *Overtest*. The Barely Overt sign, of which a name is an example does not expressly distinguish its Original from its Interpretant, nor its reference to either from the Sign itself. The *Overter* sign of which an Assertion is an example.

Thus the Sign has a double function.

First, to affect a mind which understands its "*Grammar*", or Method of Signification, which signification is its Substance Significate or Interpretant.

Second, to indicate how to identify the conditions under which sign its significate has the mode of being it is represented as having.

1909 Oct 29. A.M. 10:45. It will probably be profitable to trace out the varieties of signs of themselves. Take, first, icons. A ring bearing a repeated pattern, considered as starting at any point may be an indefinitely exact icon of itself considered as starting at any corresponding point. Yet it is necessary that these points should be individually identified; and that requires that there should be something which is

not copied, each as the E and S of the figure. This is true of every icon. If it were in all respects a perfect icon it would be indistinguishable from and for all intents and purposes the very same thing as its Object. It thus seems to be of the very essence of an icon that it should not be perfect; and if this be so, then unquestionably an icon may represent nothing but itself, by every part of it representing a different part and there being a cycle of representations.



Instead of a cycle there may be an endless sequence of representations. Thus imagine the series of all real positive rational quantities to be expressed in the order of their values as a doubly endless series of fractions in their lowest terms. Then the whole series of their numerators may be regarded as an icon of the numerators of their doubles and those of their triples and so on and may be regarded as represented by the series of numerators of their halves their thirds etc. and so on ad infinitum both ways and in all these their limits (which may be regarded at will as included areas excluded) remain the same.

1909 Oct 29 P.M.2:00. When the cause as appearance is so connected with a state of things as to indicate the presence of the latter it is an index of that state of things.

Thus the woman's coming out of the weather-houses is an *index* of moisture in the atmosphere. A purple precipitate an addition of a salt of tin is an index of the presence of gold. The communication of blue to starch paste is an index of the presence of free iodine etc.

So the appearance of a faint light in a particular point of the heavens as viewed through a great telescope is an *index* of such a light there whenever one looks there even without a telescope. Is this not an index of itself? Intensification of any sensation comes under the same head.

But one of the functions of an Index is to call attention to something, as when one points a finger. Now is there any reason why a thing should not call attention to itself? It is true that if a sign calls attention to anything, it is in order to bring something else to attention. But it may be that that is at bottom itself, in some cases.

May not a testimony be emphatically a witness of its own truth, so that it is impossible not to believe it?

1909 Oct 30. P.M. 1:00. As for Indices, it is plain that a man may point to himself and the purpose of many an exclamation is chiefly to call attention to itself and its neighbours in space and time of whatever description they may be.

Or say "*whatever* they be". [And by the way, why should not a scientific dialect have a special grammar, selective pronouns, prepositions, conjunctions, and perhaps even interjections.]

One incidental remark may be made here. The question may be asked whether a photograph is an *Icon* or an *Iconic Index*, since similarity with its object is produced by physical necessity. Now if the distinction between Icon, Index, and Symbol be, as I have defined it, a distinction in the relation of the Sign to its Real or Dynamical Object, then the Photograph is certainly not an Icon but is an Index, and the phrase "Iconic Index" seems to be self-contradictory. But using my terminology of ¹³/₃ years ago, its relation to its Actual Interpretant and still better the *word* (though not exactly the definition) that I proposed 1905 Oct 12 [**Appendix D**], it is an *idoseme* (then spelled *Eidoseme*). That is to say that it directly *exhibits* its signification, or Dynamic Interpretant (But Qu[estion]: Is it the *dynamic* interpretant? It is rather the "signification" or interpretant as embodied in the Real Object.)

That is to say, it brings up the ideas which are referred to the object by Association by Resemblance and neither by Association by Contiguity, or yet by the third mode of Association as that which is capable of accounting for the facts exhibited.

APPENDIX D. Excerpts from the Logic Notebook (MS 339)

[256r]

1. There are signs each of which A sign may have for its object represented an abstract fragment of being not capable of existence by itself, or even of distinct representation apprehension without a sort of blurr [sic.] attached to it, the vague appellation of what is omitted. Such a sign may be termed a *hypostatically abstract sign*, or a *Hypostatic*.

1905 Oct. 12. [257r].

2. The dynamic object represented may be an existent represented as existing regardless of any other existence. Such a sign may be termed a *Concrete*.

3. A sign may have for its dynamic object a type in its mode of having as type object; that is, as existing in combining generalized existents. Such a sign may be is termed a *Collective*.

 β . As to manner in which the sign is determined to represent the dynamical object.

1. A sign may represent its dynamical object simply by virtue of its own abstract quality. It thus represents whatever else has that quality. Such a sign is termed an *Icon*. Icons either represent unanalyzed qualities, when they are simple *likenesses*, or they have structures like the structure of the object, when is found they are *analogues*, or if are made for the purpose are *diagrams*.

2. A sign may represent its object in consequence of being connected with it in fact. Such a sign is termed an *Index*.

3. A sign may represent its dynamic object simply by virtue of a law, or habit, according to which it will be interpreted as representing that object. Such a sign is called a *Symbol*.

1905 Oct. 12 continued [258r]. [C is crossed out]

C. Signs are divisible according to their interpretants

a. According to their Immediate Interpretants

1. A sign may simply seek tend to determine in the field of interpretation an abstract an abstract quality like its own, simply. Such a sign may be termed an *ejaculation*.

2. A sign may have for its direct purpose to determine an actual event. The interpretant it desires may be a fact action. Such a sign may be termed an *Imperative*.

3. A sign may be a sign proper, i.e., have for its purpose to produce a sign immediate expressed purpose the determination in the field of interpretation of a sign of its own object represented as representing itself. Such a sign may be termed a *Significative*.

b. According to their Dynamic Interpretants.

a. According to the nature of the Dynamic Interpretant in itself.

1. A sign may simply tend to extend an a vague abstract quality of its own. Such a sign may be termed an ejaculant *ejaculative*. Interrogative?

2. A sign may be simply strive give expression to an effort to produce then and there a definite fact, in some sort opposite responsive or complementary to itself. Such a sign may be termed a *Imperative*.

3. A sign may, as a sign proper, seek to determine a sign in the field of interpretation. Such a sign may be termed a *Significative*.

1905 Oct. 12 continued [259r].

b. According to their Dynamic Interpretants.

a. As to the nature of the Dynamic Interpretant in itself.

[The truth of the matter is that my division of the Interpretants is feeble and doesn't come out clearly nor effect what it should.

A sign may express a need of a {vague / definite {as to its nature as to the object to be affected

A sign instead of expressing a need may be itself the establishment of assent to a regulation, that is, may be a contract.

A sign may neither express a need nor be a transaction but may simply cause the interpreter to look. Or in general to produce an effect. To be a carrying into effect upon the field of interpretation

According to this signs may be divided into Desiderative Effective Transactive

1905 Oct. 12 continued [260r]. The immediate interpretant is the interpretant as the sign expresses it, the interpretant that the sign of itself creates; and it is to be taken into account in the classification in so far as its different relations functions (?) effect different forms of the sign.

The dynamic interpretant is the {sign of the object / interpretant determined by the sign in a field of interpretation exterior to the sign; and it has to be taken into account in so far as different kinds forms of signs require different kinds of {signs of the object / dynamic interpretants and also in so far as the different modes [of] relations of the excited sign of the object in the exciting sign make the latter to be function as a sign.

The representative interpretant is what the the sign that is required to signify the professed identity or agreement of the sign with its dynamic object.

a. As to the immediate interpretant

1. It may be what is required to fulfill a need expressed in the sign, but which is not itself definitely expressed. It may be Such a sign may be termed a *Desiderative*

Potentive. If the interpretant needed is a sign, the Desiderative [sic., Potentive] is an *Interrogative.* If it is a feeling it is an *Ejaculative.* If it is an action it is a *Desiderative.*

2. It may be that what is required is a definitely expressed action on a definite occasion. In that case Such a sign may be termed an *Imperative*.

3. It may be that the required interpretant is anything whatever that fulfills certain general conditions. Such a sign may well be termed *Significative*.

1905 Oct. 12 continued [261r].

- b. As to the Dynamic Interpretant
 - a. In itself

1. The sign may be such that it can only be interpreted properly in *feeling* or in a *possibility*. [The reason why an abstract quality is indefinite is that what I mean by an abstract quality consists in the *possibility* of something. Now to say that anything is *possible* is to say that under *some* unspecified conditions it will occur. The *some* is the mark of indefinitudes.]

Such a sign may be termed an *eidoseme*.

2. The sign may be such that it can only be interpreted in an existential fact. Such a sign may be termed an *ergoseme*.

3. The sign may be such that it can only be interpreted primarily in a sign.

Such a sign may be termed a *logoseme*.

 β . In the relation nature of the appeal of the sign to it.

1. The sign may be such that its can only natural mode of appeal to its dynamic interpretant is by *sympathy*

2. The sign maybe such that its can only natural mode of appeal to its dynamic interpretant is by *compulsion*

3. The sign may be such that its natural mode of appeal to its dynamic interpretant is by *reason*

c. As to the Representative Interpretant $\boldsymbol{\alpha}.$ In itself

[These October 12, 1905 draft entries end here, with the figure on the left drawn in the marginal. The next entry in the *Logic Notebook* following the above pages [257r–261r] is where Appendix B begins [262r].]

