The university of Chicago Press is pleased to announce the launch of **Signs and Society**, a new open-access journal focusing on the study of sign processes (or semiosis) in the realms of social action, cognition, and cultural form.

**Call for Papers**

The journal is now accepting submissions for a supplementary issue, “Representing Transcendence” (Winter 2014).

Students of semiosis have long realized that signs and symbols, in their “standing for” function, are normally more “evident” (perceptible, experiential) than what they represent (or re-present). In fact, one of the classic definitions of the sign stresses that they need to “reveal” something that was, at some previous time, less known or even unknown. More recently, Carlo Ginzburg has looked at a set of signs, including clues, evidence, and traces, that, taken together form a deeply rooted tradition of semiotic reasoning. But what happens if this foundational semiotic relationship between the evident and the non-evidence is modified to meet particular cultural circumstances in which various expressive forms (sculpted objects, painted images, verbal forms, musical compositions) are designed not to reveal their objects or to reveal the non-knowability of their objects. A comparatively widespread instance of this modification would be where religious traditions establish conventions governing the representation of transcendence, that is, some power, being, or object that, being “beyond knowing,” cannot possibly be represented. Indeed, the successful representation of the non-representable is one way to positively demonstrate the potency, agency, or eternity of these sacred powers, beings, or objects, since being “beyond knowledge” implies a corresponding limitation of mere human knowers.

This supplementary issue of Signs and Society will address this paradox of “representing transcendence” across time and across disciplines. Considerable scholarship in this area has already identified a number of cultural strategies for confronting this paradox. An image of a footprint (or an empty altar) can index the past presence but present absence of deity. Depictions of ritual acts of veiling and unveiling or wrapping and unwrapping can suggest a transformational process of becoming non-evident. Similarly, a number of cultural traditions permit the representation of deities on the condition that part of the representation states or implies that the image was itself “not made by human hands.” And complex images can present the differential between the evident and the non-evident as a visual hierarchy, such as a heavenly ladder or as the movement from light to darkness. To these three examples many more could be added. But rather than merely generating an inventory of these kinds of representational devices, we hope, through comparative examples, to be able to ask a number of more interesting questions. First, what are the particular sociocultural or historical conditions that seem to support or require these paradoxical semiotic processes? Second, do the conventions regarding material images extend to other semiotic registers in a given society? Third, in what specifiable range of societies do these devices occur, perhaps in typological contrast to societies where non-human forces are immanent rather than transcendent? Fourth, what do different “imaginaries” governing the representation of transcendence tell us more generally about a culture’s concept of materiality itself, especially ideas about the relation or separation of the tangible and the non-tangible.

This supplementary issue will be co-edited by Massimo Leone at the University of Turin (massimo.leone@unito.it) and Richard J. Parmentier at Brandeis University (rparmentier@brandeis.edu). We encourage scholars from various disciplines in the social sciences and humanities to contact either of us to discuss a possible contribution. The deadline for submitting completed manuscripts is August 15, 2013, though we hope to begin the peer-review process much before that date.