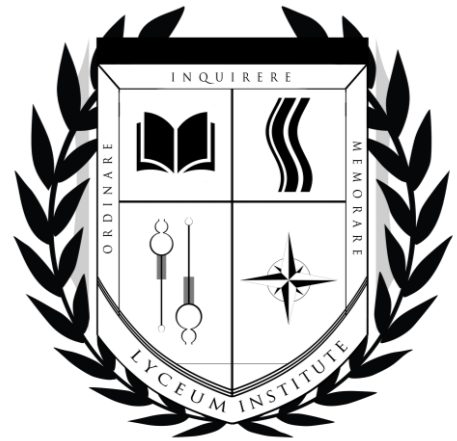


# SEMIOTICS: AN INTRODUCTION

SEMINAR SYLLABUS

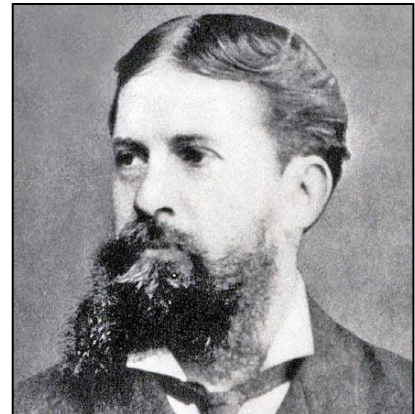
[SUMMER 2021]

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## DESCRIPTION

What is a sign? Though a seemingly simple question, and one which may receive a technically simple answer, attaining a clear understanding of signs is a task both very difficult and very important; so important, in fact, that the whole future of philosophy (and by extension, human knowledge in general) depends upon our getting the answer right. A great deal of our present difficulty, in the 21st century, follows from several centuries' failure to attain a true semiotics. To begin rectifying this, I believe we must draw on a handful of key sources: John Poincaré, Charles Sanders Peirce, and John Deely. In this seminar, we will focus on Peirce and his unique contributions to the foundations of the discipline of semiotics proper and show how we must instantiate an understanding of signs in our day-to-day practices, both practically and theoretically.



Among the specific goals for the seminar are to understand the general theory of semiotics—as the study of the action of signs—which was founded in Charles Peirce and has since been developed; though we cannot truly grasp this notion of signs unless we first understand the categorical basis of Peirce's thought, or his "phaneroscopy"; and by grasping this phaneroscopy, along with the general notion of "sign", we will further pursue the goal of understanding how signs play a role in specifically human thinking.

## METHOD

The seminar is 8 weeks long, with one recorded lecture and one discussion sessions each week. Each discussion session is structured around a reading from Charles Peirce. Participants are expected to have read the assigned reading and listened to the lecture prior to the session, so that they may engage in a semi-structured discussion directed and moderated by the instructor. As this is an advanced seminar, one *cannot* participate well without a *deep engagement* with the assigned reading. Moreover, *continual discussion* will foster that participation and engagement throughout the week. Participants will be expected to partake in these discussions on a regular basis, and will be challenged to do so directly

## READING

Each week includes (scheduled below) an assigned reading, primarily from the two volumes of *The Essential Peirce*. These are available on Amazon [[Volume 1](#)] [[Volume 2](#)] and may be found used for low costs (I also recommend checking [Bookfinder.com](#)). I highly recommend purchasing these books, as the reading is a central part of participation in the seminar.

Additionally, a number of supplemental readings are available through the Files tab on Teams (where one may also find all the recordings and other supplemental materials). Further suggested readings pertinent to semiotics in its history and development are included on the Teams channel. These materials are not essential to the course but are suggestions for anyone wishing to look further into the topic.

## LECTURE

Each week there will also be a 20-40+ minute audio lecture, posted to Teams at the beginning of the week. This lecture will be based upon the assigned reading, but will also stray into related topics, or may use the reading as a launching point for addressing some related issue (perhaps one more general, or perhaps one more specific). The purpose of these lectures is to help clarify some of the more difficult concepts and arguments in Peirce, as well as to raise specific questions that should help structure and guide our discussion sessions.

There may be accompanying PowerPoints or other visual aids (diagrams are of particular use in trying to understand Charles Peirce, himself a “diagrammatic” thinker), in order to provide some clarity as to textual points, but one *should* be able, in most cases, to simply listen to the lecture (and perhaps consult the visual aids later). This should allow more flexibility: making the lectures suitable accompaniment for a commute, while doing chores, etc.

## DISCUSSION

The heart of the seminar is the discussion session (**Saturdays 3:00-4:00pm ET**): where all the thoughts emergent and encountered throughout the week—via the reading, lecture, and on-going conversations in the Teams channel—are brought into explicit conversation. This allows us to attempt a concerted effort at bringing resolution to our difficulties, and—failing such a resolution—to direct our inquiry further.

Each discussion session will begin with a brief synopsis of the week’s material and a focusing on whichever aspects of that material seem most pressing. Beyond the direction provided by the instructor, participants are encouraged to bring their own concerns explicitly into view and to engage with the instructor and one another in civil debate and collective inquiry.

## CONTRIBUTION

It is hoped and expected that each participant in the seminar will provide a contribution: a piece of writing, recorded presentation, or something else, within one month of the seminar’s conclusion, as a way of coalescing what has been learned in a demonstrative manner. Topics are suggested, and the instructor is available for discussions and assistance in composing your contribution.

## SESSION SCHEDULE

June 12	<p>Opening Inquiry: What is a Sign?            Lecture: Introducing Semiotics            Reading: Kemple, "The Familiar Unknown"</p>
June 19	<p>Categories and Experience            Lecture: Phaneroscopy            Reading: Peirce, <i>EP.1</i>, "On a New List of Categories"</p>
June 26	<p>Thought through Signs            Lecture: What is Thinking?            Reading: Peirce, <i>EP.1</i>, "Questions Concerning Certain Faculties Claimed for Man" and "Some Consequences of Four Incapacities"</p>
July 3	<p>Signs of Thinking            Lecture: Discerning the Signs of our Thoughts            Reading: Peirce, <i>EP.2</i>, "What is a Sign?" and "Of Reasoning in General"</p>
July 10	<p>The Structure of the Sign            Lecture: Triadic Relations            Reading: Peirce, <i>EP.2</i>, Excerpts from Letters to Lady Welby and William James</p>
July 17	<p>Logic and Signs            Lecture: Signs in the Process of Reasoning            Reading: Peirce, <i>EP.2</i>, "Sundry Logical Conceptions" and "Nomenclature and Division of Triadic Relations"</p>
July 24	<p>Semiotic Realism            Lecture: The Direction of Thought            Reading: Peirce, <i>EP.2</i>, "What Pragmatism Is"</p>
July 31	<p>The Continuity of Thought            Lecture: Semiotics as Synechistic            Reading: Peirce, <i>EP.2</i>, "A Neglected Argument for the Reality of God"</p>