

CAERDROIA

THE JOURNAL OF
MAZES & LABYRINTHS



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CAERDROIA 54

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The Journal of Mazes & Labyrinths

54th Edition



*Photo of the recently discovered Chequers Labyrinth drawing. Photo: J. Furse-Roberts, 2024
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Cover : detail from the Watts Chapel altar, Compton, England, ca. 1898. Photo: J. Saward

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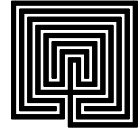
Caerdroia 54 was produced during September and October 2025 by Jeff and Kimberly Saward at Labyrinthos HQ. Opinions stated by contributors are not always those of the editors, but *Caerdroia* welcomes open discussion to provide a forum for all who are lured by the labyrinth.

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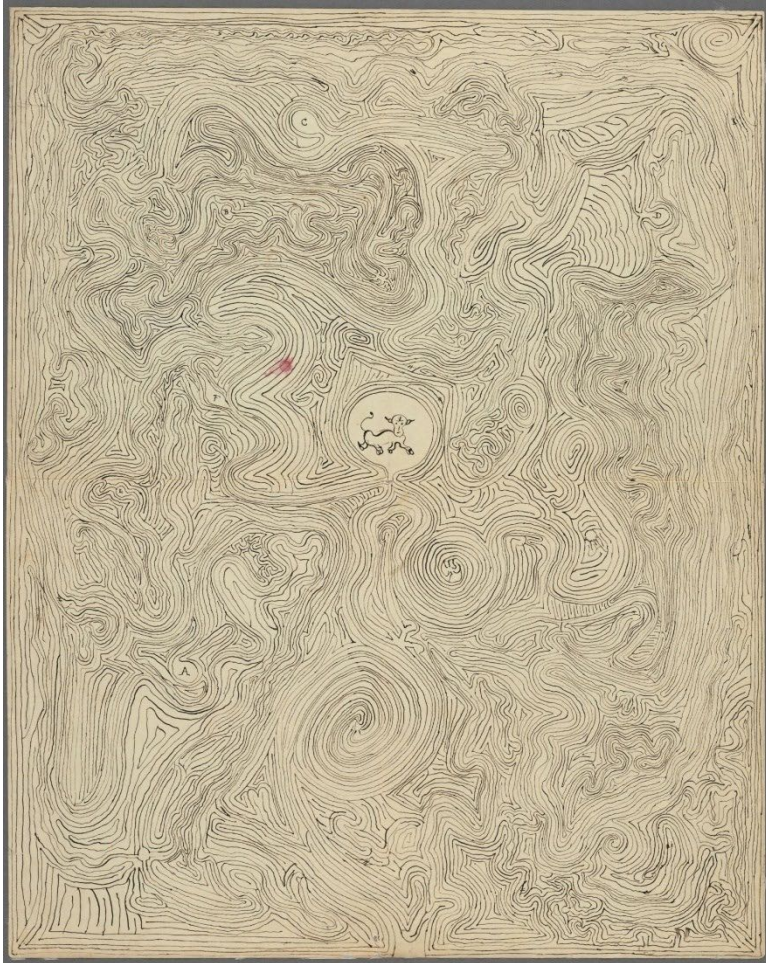
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The Labyrinth of Signs

Rolf Johansson



Charles Sanders Peirce (1839 – 1914) left behind many thousands of handwritten pages and drawings. He stated himself that he was thinking in diagrams and not in words. One of his drawings, now in the Harvard University Library, imagines a labyrinth.¹ It is not known when Peirce made this drawing called “the Labyrinth of Signs.”



Charles Sanders Peirce's representation of his notion of a Labyrinth of Signs. Photograph courtesy of the Harvard University Archives. MS Am 1632 (1537). Houghton Library, Harvard University

Peirce was very well read in ancient literature and mastered both Greek and Latin languages and it is obvious that his drawing refers to the Minotaur myth, even if the monster in the middle seems remarkably modest. The winding paths are complicated to the extreme; if the mythical labyrinth had this layout, for sure it would have been impossible to find a way out without guidance. Fortunately for us, Peirce has given direction. His Ariadne's thread is drawn on the back of the paper. It is mirrored; Peirce must have drawn it by holding his labyrinth drawing against a window.

The back of Peirce's drawing. Photograph courtesy of the Harvard University Archives. MS Am 1632 (1537). Houghton Library, Harvard University

The idea of a slow and winding hike to reach something desirable appears many times in Peirce's thinking. Already as a young boy he wrote a fairy tale where he "try to climb the hill of knowledge ... he goes on so slow & sure that there can be no doubt of succeeding ...". He later called this "step-by-small-step progress" to gain knowledge for "pedestrianism." [Brent 1998:42-43]. In 1908, six years before he died, Peirce wrote three essays for the journal *The Monist* called "Some Amazing Mazes" aiming to present his system of logics and metaphysics to the public.



In his metaphysics Peirce reduced and revised Kant's categories into three, and "Sign" is one of them. In his notion we live in a universe of signs. Signs can be anything that represent something. They "include pictures, symptoms, words, sentences, books, libraries, signals, orders of command, microscopes, legislative representations, musical concertos, performances of these" [MS 634:18]². Our thoughts develop by our interpretations of signs together with the objects they represent, and those interpretations constitute new signs, which are more fully developed. In my understanding, signs can be regarded as clues, which all together leads us to guessing – forming a hypothesis – of the full picture of what may be the case. This principle of logic which direct us to something of a new quality, is what Peirce calls "abduction." It is an act of informed guessing based on experience and sagacity. Sherlock Holmes, Dupin and Zadig are literary characters that show excellence in this practice.³



Peirce's labyrinth is understood as "a Labyrinth of Signs" referring to his complex theory of signs, his semiotics. This is itself an interpretation – the "interpretant" in Peirce's vocabulary – of the drawing as a sign, which is a new sign. References by Peirce to an understanding of the world we live in as navigating through a labyrinth are many. "We find ourselves in the vestibule of the labyrinth. Yes, The Labyrinth – in the vestibule only, but yet in that tremendous, only Labyrinth" [CP 2.79]⁴. We experience the world through interpretations of signs which together form a complex web of chains of signs, which are constantly reinterpreted and developed into new signs, in Peirce's worldview.

*The solution to the Labyrinth of Signs,
copied and mirrored by the author*

I have spent hours trying to figure out what the different places called A, B, C, and so on, in his drawing can tell me, but my attempts so far came to nothing; I get lost. In the long run I hope for a step-by-small-step progress in my mission. It is a comfort that Peirce claims that humans have a predisposition to guess right rather than wrong. This implies that there is a constant development towards more enlightened thinking when we guess at the riddle, time and again.

Rolf Johansson, Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences,
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Notes

1. Harvard University Library has more than 100,000 of Peirce's working papers, lectures, drawings, essays and articles in their collection. They are publicly accessible.
2. MS refers to a manuscript in Houghton Library, Harvard University.
3. Authors Arthur Conan Doyle, Edgar Allan Poe, François Voltaire.
4. CP refers to Peirce (1931-35, 1958) and numbers to volume and paragraph.

References

- Brent, Joseph. (1998). *Charles Sanders Peirce. A Life*. Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press.
- Peirce, Charles Sanders. (1931-35, 1958). *Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce*.



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