

## Editorial

### Nature and culture: a semiotic perspective<sup>1</sup>

There are several ways of defining 'concepts and words' and the very act of doing it is a semiotic exercise of *mapping* one's identity, which coincides with investing "something" with meaning. The tracing of a significant individual map, within the borders of which every human being is able of building up their 'own universe' (geographically and historically located), means the developing of semiotic competence carried out through three important dimensions<sup>2</sup>: **a)** the ability to circumscribe a territory (of the sign) and to identify it as belonging to oneself through acts of *perceiving*, *investing* and *tracing* specific characteristics; **b)** the making of the universe around *our* universe, *our* inhabited world through the power of *observing*, *interpreting*, *remembering* and *preserving* signs; **c)** the capacity of *reading* (of encoding and decoding a sign's message) functions and codes within a system, which involves a dynamic *change* and *exchange*. These three dimensions foreground three other semiotic concepts – *relation*, *relationship* and *relatedness* –, which reveal *nature* and *culture* as "sign-complexes that we use to orient ourselves and to formulate our actions"<sup>3</sup>. They also show the existence "in the middle"<sup>4</sup> of a (C)creator/maker of signs as possessor of a grand quality, that of an "*observing* (our it.) subject"<sup>5</sup>, able to modify the surroundings, to give them purposeful meanings and to communicate them through language. And, thirdly, we consider that they highlight the complementarity of *nature* and *culture*; it is this relationship that brings to light the (dis)harmony establishing itself between the two "sign-complexes". It also enhances the process by means of which the *world*, inhabited by sign-makers and sign-users alike, gets a historical quality and shapes into *culture* through *relatedness*, consisting of the inner invisible threads of the fabric/context which make them exist, survive, develop, grow, become something/ somebody (= build up their own identities) and then, *stand for something /somebody else*<sup>6</sup>.

That is the reason for which we consider that we cannot take the tens of definitions<sup>7</sup> given to *culture* and *nature* separately as far as we refer to and are concerned with *becoming*, a process involving states of (dis)connectedness within the stages of turning *nature* into *culture*; on the contrary, the three *r-s* (relation, relationship and relatedness), while *working* in the semiotic universes (of the matter and of the mind), invite to a *reconsideration* of borders, a *redefining* of roles, a *relocation* of signs, and, implicitly, a *rereading* of discourses, according to new codes, models and modeling systems.

The papers of this issue *map* the three dimensions mentioned above, while making the "observing subject" inhabit various *spacetime* frameworks and, thus, allowing him/her to interpret cultural and natural phenomena which acquire their own identity through discourse.

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<sup>1</sup> See also the 2014 Editorial to *CP* on "semiotics of culture and/or cultural semiotics?"

<sup>2</sup> For the way such dimensions work in *nature* and *culture*, see D. Cmeciu's *Signifying Systems in Literary Texts* (2003).

<sup>3</sup> See Chapter 7, "Nature and culture. From object to sign", in Johansen, J.D. & Larsen, S.E. (2002: 150-198).

<sup>4</sup> Such an *existence* calls to mind Robert Frost's poem *The Secret Sits* ("We dance round in a ring and suppose,/But the Secret sits in the middle and knows.")

<sup>5</sup> Eero Tarasti (2000:155) considers that in a "semiotics of landscape", there is always a "«[c]entre», constituted by the observing subject whom the land-scape surrounds."

<sup>6</sup> Cmeciu, D., 2003: 5-8.

<sup>7</sup> See Chapter II "Defining concepts" in D. Cmeciu's *A Theory of Discourse* (2014: 70-88).