

Editorial

Semiotics of culture and/or Cultural semiotics?

The latter half of the 20th century has witnessed an emergence of studies on: how natural and invented signs¹ operate in nature and culture; how can a sign represent (its capacity to represent being crucial to both semiology² and semiotics³), how can sign-makers and sign-users cooperate in their surrounding world; how is signification produced within culture; how language serves as model for any other signifying practice. There are tens of answers given by linguists, philosophers, anthropologists, sociologists, cultural studies theoreticians, to such semiotic concerns. And yet, for the limited space imposed by an editorial, we will mention only a few titles and authors that provide provocative information on issues such as cultural semiotics and semiotics of culture.

One such name is a writer, David Lodge⁴, author of *Small World. An Academic Romance* (1984) and of *Nice Work* (1988), where, against an academic contextual frame, he makes his characters debate on what semiotics is, on its cognitive function, on modes of representing various cultures and realities, on semiotic competence, or on different other critical theories.

The other name is Yuri Lotman⁵, who, in his *Universe of the Mind* (first published in 1990) offers a semiotic approach to culture. For him, semiotics is a cognitive science by means of which the world can not only be interpreted but also constructed. The world is apprehended by means of two semiotic modelling systems: **a)** language as a primary modelling system allows sign makers and decoders to 'apprehend' the world⁶ they live in according to the specific model it offers, and **b)** cultural rules, religion, myth, the language of art and science constitute the secondary modelling systems. Culture is made of such models that are *represented* by texts, which are dynamic processes through history. Thus, we may refer to the existence of some deep invariants that are offered by conceptual patterns (and which constitute the core of a semiotics of culture) and to the unfolding of processes when signs are 'in use' (which cultural semiotics circumscribes as its subject of study).

As far as *culture* is a space of change and exchange, dynamically delimiting its new borders, then we should view the semiotics of culture and cultural semiotics in terms of *relatedness*, of part to whole and whole mapping its parts (which may be interpreted as *memory* and *processes* recollected through texts). The acts of resignifying History through verbal and visual discourses in children's literature and of 'observing' nature's functions in folk tales trace the trajectory of a mind's processing the world into meaningful wholes, as shown by the articles of this issue.

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¹ According to *The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary on Historical Principles*, 'sign' comes from the Latin *signum*, which means "token, mark, symbol; a mark of attestation; a cognizance; an emblem; a signal; a trace of something".

² In his *Cours de linguistique générale* (published posthumously, in 1916) Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913) defined semiology as the science of linguistic signs, structured on a dyadic relation, and of the laws governing them.

³ According to the American philosopher, logician and semiotician Charles Sanders Peirce (1839-1914), the founder of modern semiotics, signs are 'dynamical entities' that transmit and generate meaning at the same time. They are structured on a triadic relation which makes any phenomenon, including cultural phenomena as well, function 'as sign that represents an object to an interpretant'. The other major concept of Peirce's theory is that of *semiosis* = the process of signifying.

⁴ David Lodge (born in London on the 28th of January 1935) is critic, author of several novels, two stage plays and scripts, visiting professor.

⁵ Yuri M. Lotman (1922-1993) is a renowned scholar, who "has applied his mind to a wide range of disciplines: aesthetics, poetics, semiotic theory, the history of culture, mythology, and cinema, in addition to the principle themes of the history of Russian literature of which he is Professor at the University of Tartu in Estonia", as Umberto Eco characterised him in the Introduction (p.vii) to *Universe of the Mind. A Semiotic Theory of Culture*.

⁶ The *world* is to be experienced and understood in terms of *nature* and *culture*, the latter being a coded system, functioning as a bordering/delimiting process.