

Subject: CFP: European Semiotics, Old and New Trends – 11th World Congress of the International Association for Semiotic Studies, Nanjing, China (5 – 9 October 2012)

Call for papers: European Semiotics, Old and New Trends
Round Table nos. 33

Special panel at the 11th World Congress of the International Association for Semiotic Studies, Nanjing, China (5 – 9 October 2012)

Panel Organizers:

Haihong Ji (School of Foreign Languages & Cultures, Nanjing Normal University, China)
jhhforever@hotmail.com

Susan Petrilli (The University of Bari Aldo Moro, Italy)
susan.petrilli@gmail.com

Augusto Ponzio (The University of Bari Aldo Moro, Italy)
augustoponzio@libero.it

Yongxiang Wang (School of Foreign Languages & Cultures, Nanjing Normal University, China)
nshdyxwang@163.com

The first Congress of the International Association for Semiotic Studies (IASS, founded in 1969) was held in Milan, in June 1974. A widespread interest in semiotic research had officially existed in Italy from the second half of the 60s in a wide range of different fields, though the works of Charles Morris had already been pionieristically introduced in Italian translation in 1949.

In 1952 Ferruccio Rossi-Landi translated Morris's *Foundations of the Theory of Signs* (1938) into Italian, and subsequently, in 1953, he published his first monograph on the latter. Charles S. Peirce had been introduced to the semiotic scenario in Italy even earlier, at the end of the nineteenth century and beginning of the twentieth century thanks to Giovanni Vailati and the information passed on to him through Victoria Welby. However, by the 1920s all traces of these early trends had disappeared (and Rossi-Landi's own work of the 1950s was mostly ignored), only to be taken up again from the early 1970s.

Appropriate terminology for semiotics was a common topic of debate worldwide from the 1960s onwards and of course was never just a terminological issue. Words refer to their objects, their referents, to the reality of the world and of our ideas about it, and in turn are modified by these objects.

The term "semiotics" was juxtaposed to "linguistics", "semantics", and "semiology". The term "semiotics" was mostly preferred by the Anglo-American and Sovietic traditions. Morris called the "science of signs", "semiotic". John Locke had reintroduced the term from the stoic tradition, in 1690, for his "doctrine of signs". Peirce used the term around 1897 in Locke's sense. In 1964 Jurij Lotman founded the most ancient journal of semiotics, *Sign Systems Studies*, which came to be known with the term "*Sémeiótiké*", whereas in 1984 he introduced the term "semiosphere" by analogy with Vernadsky's "biosphere", introduced in 1926. However, Lotman limited the reference of his term "semiosphere" to the cultural world, whereas with "biosemiotics" and "global semiotics" the semiosphere at last coincides with the biosphere. The term "semiology", which translates the French "*sémiologie*", was mostly preferred by the Francophone tradition. Saussure is recorded to have used the term "*sémiologie*" for the first time in a note dated November 1894, and Roland Barthes published his *Elements de sémiologie* in 1964. Although sometimes "semiotic" and "semiology" are interchangeable synonyms, some authors, like Louis Hjelmslev, make a point of clearly distinguishing between them.

On Thomas A. Sebeok's account the variant "semiotics" was publicly introduced by Margaret Mead in 1962, and thereafter was widely, though not universally, adopted. Though regarded by some workers as a needless barbarism, Sebeok accepted it as for the title of his series, *Approaches to Semiotics*. By contrast, the International Association for Semiotics Studies decided on the Latin compromise *Semiotica* for its official international journal.

Like the Roman divinity Janus, Western semiotics can be characterized as having two faces, one turned towards Europe inclusive of the Tartu-Moscow tradition (now renominated the Tartu-Moscow-Bloomington tradition keeping account of the contribution to semiotic studies made by Sebeok and his “global semiotics”), and the other turned towards semiotics in the United States.

It is important to explore goals, intentions and orientations characterizing the analysis of signs, meaning, communication, of sign behaviour generally, in their different forms – linguistic and non-linguistic, verbal and nonverbal, normal and pathological, vocal and written, intentional and unintentional, human and nonhuman, responsible and irresponsible, ideological and nonideological, natural and cultural.

Semiotics as it finds expression today is the result of different phases of development across the twentieth century: these can be summarized in terms of the transition from so-called “semiotics of communication” or “code semiotics”, to “semiotics of signification” through to “semiotics of interpretation”, or better “semiotics of significance” given that interpretation is involved in all phases.

A significant issue concerns the role of structuralism in language and sign studies. Structuralism arises with linguistics, therefore with Saussure, the Moscow school, the Prague school, and subsequently is extended to other fields as in the case of anthropology with Claude Levi-Strauss. But as Gilles Deleuze observes in “À quoi reconnaît-on le structuralisme?”, structure can only be traced in language, even if a question of exoteric or nonverbal language. If the unconscious has a structure this is because the unconscious speaks and is language, if bodies have a structure this is because bodies speak through the language of symptoms. Deleuze even claims that objects have a structure insofar as they speak silently, through sign language. Structuralism has exerted a profound influence on Western thought as regards signs, language and behaviour and has been developed in different directions, as in the case, for example, of another French scholar, Algirdas J. Greimas. His position in semiotic studies is no doubt *sui generis* and yet he has greatly influenced semiotic studies in Europe including Italy.

In the framework of Western semiotics as we are delineating it, other authors who emerge as giants for the theoretical consistency and originality of their work, in some cases also for the influence exerted on the development of semiotic research generally – its goals, methods and trends – include, in addition to the already mentioned Peirce, Morris, Welby, Saussure, Barthes, Hjelmslev, Levi-Strauss, Lotman, Greimas, Sebeok, Rossi-Landi, Deleuze, and limiting our list to recent developments from the end of the nineteenth century across the whole twentieth century, Edmund Husserl, Ludwig Wittgenstein, Roman Jakobson, Ernst Cassirer, Susanne Langer, Luis Prieto, Umberto Eco, Julia Kristeva, Mikhail Bakhtin, Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, etc.

No doubt a key role must be acknowledged to Thomas A. Sebeok both for the importance of his theoretical contribution to the advancement of semiotic studies worldwide, and for his commitment to establishing semiotics as a discipline practiced internationally. That the 2012 International IASS Congress should take place in China and for the first time beyond the boundaries of the so-called “Western world”, and certainly beyond Europe, may be interpreted as a direct result of the cultural politics implemented by Sebeok throughout his whole lifetime as well as responding to the sign science itself and its search for new horizons, and not only in a geographical sense. With respect to the ferment in semiotic studies, in particular as they have developed across the second half of the twentieth century, it is now time to ask, again like two-faced Janus, what remains from the past, and where lies the future?

Papers are invited to address any of the issues mentioned in this presentation and others still related to the general topic, “European Semiotics, Old and New Trends”.

Please send abstracts of no more than 500 words in Rich Text Format or Word doc attached to an email and addressed to the panel organizers by 30 June 2012.

A maximum of 15 to 20 minutes will be allowed for each presentation.

For further information concerning abstract submission, see attachment nos. 3.

For registration details, see attachment nos. 2. For general information concerning the Congress and Call for Papers, see attachment 4.

Main Congress website: <<http://www.semio2012.com/>><http://www.semio2012.com/>