



ABSTRACTS

Students international research day in cultural semiotics:

„Semiosphere and Society: Development, Change and Hacking Societies‘ collective concepts.”

Tuesday 29th January 2019: 10.00-14.00

Room 1.11.0.009

The Lotmanian concept of the semiosphere has inspired and still is inspiring intellectuals in diverse disciplines that are concerned with the complexity of cultural change and its inner dynamics. As a central concept of semiotics, the Lotmanian semiosphere and its further development and differentiation by combining it with other approaches and subconcepts, as well as its application to diverse cultural phenomena will be discussed by semioticians and students of the master program “Applied Cultural Studies and Cultural Semiotics”, who themselves present an example of its analytical usefulness.

Abstracts

Peter Torop (University of Tartu): (Keynote) “Semiosphere: theoretical notion and practical tool.“

1. General background: a) „Genetically speaking, culture is built upon two primary languages. One of these is the natural language used by humans in everyday communication.[...]The nature of the second primary language is not quiet as clear. This language is the structural model of space“ (J.Lotman. Text and Cultural Polyglotism); b) „The fundamental “task” of culture, as we will try to show, is in structurally organizing the world around man. [...]Culture is the generator of structuredness, and in this way it creates a social sphere around man which, like the biosphere, makes life possible; that is, not organic life, but social life” (J. Lotman and B. Uspensky. On the Semiotic Mechanism of Culture).
2. Terminological field of semiosphere: semiosphere as singular notion; semiosphere – noosphere; text (textuality) – semiosphere – explosion; semiosphere I – semiosphere II.
3. Ontological specificity of semiosphere: „... all the levels of the semiosphere — ranging from a human individual or an individual text to global semiotic unities — are all like semiospheres inserted into each other, then each and one of them is both a participant in the dialogue (a part of the semiosphere) as well as the space of the dialogue (an entire semiosphere)” (J. Lotman 1999: 33).
4. Specificity of semiospherical analysis: a) temporal aspect (past and present); holistic aspect (part and whole); dialogic aspect (static and dynamic). Importance of observer in semiospherical analysis. Boundary of semiosphere and importance of languages of description and cultural memory. Semiosphere and/as sphere of semiotization: practical examples.

Franciscu Sedda (University of Cagliari): (Keynote) “Rethinking the Semiosphere: An Old Concept for a New Semiotics”

“Semiosphere” is the most famous among Lotman’s concepts. Yet it is not easy to describe, even because through the idea of Semiosphere Lotman tries to grasp and represent the complex, paradoxical, dynamics culture is made of. Our presentation aims to trace back the intellectual origin of the concept developed by our author in the 1980s; to describe and rethink some of its main features, highlighting its *relationalist* soul; to show how it dialogues with contemporary intellectual trends in the study of meaning and cultures and how it can be applied to analyse contemporary cultural objects, practices, and encounters.

To achieve our task we will show how the Semiosphere is tied with concepts like *text, language, border, translation, creolization, self-description* and how it can be more deeply developed considering concepts like *formation, narrativity, correlation, glocalization*. During our lesson we will use a wide range of examples taken from the history of cultures and languages as well as from the spheres of contemporary communication and everyday life. This will help us to foster the dialogue with the audience while it will hopefully make it easier to understand and perceive the very idea of semiosphere, since, as Lotman said, “dialogue precedes language and gives birth to it”.

Eva Kimminich (University of Potsdam): “Semiospheric Turbulences and Hacking of internal Spheres”

The presentation combines the dynamic aspects of Lotman’s concept with the socio-constructivist approach, focusing on the possible impact of individual semiosis as an application of programmatic semantic sets on the prevalence of a subsphere in the semiospheric hierarchy. Through the analysis of a right-wing populist internet platform (PI-News), the populist strategy of argumentation is examined as an operation on semantic categories within competing political subspheres. It shows on the one hand what theoretically happens when the central memes of democracy (like tolerance, care, freedom, equality or freedom of press) are hacked by shifting the respective related semantic categories (like true/false, politically correct/incorrect. On the other hand it shows how the resulting semiospheric turbulences are provoked by the presetting of semiosis.

Julius Erdmann (Universität Potsdam): Appropriation of Space across semiospheric Shifting.

I will argue how the revolutionary situation in Tunisia (2010/11) helped to transform graffiti signs from a merely peripheral into a central mode of expression. ‘Central’ does not signify that Graffiti signs in the public place are to be taken as the dominant and general medium for Tunisians to express themselves in public. I rather want to show that the spatio-visual code of graffiti signs became a legitimate code for political expression in public and for the symbolic re-appropriation of public space. This shift of meaning comes along with two dynamics: A) The structural development of the Tunisian semiosphere from the moment of a semio-cultural explosion during the revolution to the process of setting again a cultural periphery and a cultural centre in the aftermath of 14th of January 2011. B) The rediscovery of public space as a medium for meaningful and political communication.