

A GLOBAL CENTER FOR LANGUAGE AND SEMIOTIC STUDIES

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The First Quarter of a Century

“Inquiry,” and the effective dissemination of its products, were precisely the missions entrusted by Indiana University President Herman B Wells to our Research Center when he created it in 1956 (initially designated Research Center for Anthropology, Folklore, and Linguistics, but in 1975 rechristened Research Center for Language and Semiotic Studies). Distinguished Professor Stith Thompson, a former Dean of the Graduate School, became the first Chairman, and, upon his retirement one year later, I was appointed to succeed him.

Our Research Center then rapidly came to assume three principal interlocking functions: research, publication, and the administrative coordination of four separate document and sound recording collections—the Archives of Folklore, the Archives of Traditional Music, the Archives of the Languages of the World, and the multi-university Human Relations Area Files (with headquarters at Yale University). After more than a decade, this line function became a considerable burden and distraction, so we recommended that these four heavily utilized research facilities be redistributed among several other campus administrative units. The Center continues, however, to house a vast offprint collection in semiotics and the language sciences, supplementing the outstanding holdings of the Indiana University Library System in these and related fields. The collection is frequently consulted by students and faculty.

The Center’s continuing Research Associates program has brought to the campus young postdoctoral scholars from many parts of the world, including Austria, France, Germany, Hungary, Israel, Italy, Japan, Poland, Portugal, Romania, and the U.S.S.R. Associates typically participate—usually for a semester or a year—in the intellectual life of our community while pursuing individually tailored study programs connected with their own specializations, which, in the past, have included anthropology, folklore, the language sciences (especially linguistics), philosophy (especially logic), and general, comparative, or applied semiotics.

Since 1969, the Center’s overall performance, and the closely associated undergraduate and graduate teaching programs in Semiotic Studies, have been under continuous scrutiny by a distinguished six-member Visiting Committee, now reporting annually and directly to the Vice President-Bloomington. Members—who normally serve for three consecutive years—have included (current ones are marked with an asterisk): *Philip M. Arnold, Vice President Emeritus, Research and Development, Phillips

Petroleum; *William Bennett, President and Director, National Humanities Center; James Billington, Director, Woodrow Wilson Center for Scholars; *Charles Blitzer, Assistant Director, Smithsonian Institution; John Brademas, President, New York University; *D. Lydia Bronte, John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation; Frederick Burkhardt, President Emeritus, American Council of Learned Societies; John B. Carroll, Kenan Professor of Psychology and Director, L.L. Thurstone Psychometric Laboratory, University of North Carolina; J Milton Cowan, Director Emeritus, Division of Modern Languages, Cornell University; *Mary Douglas, Avalon Professor in the Humanities, Northwestern University; Charles A. Ferguson, Professor, Department of Linguistics, Stanford University; Charles Frankel,† former President, National Humanities Center; Roman Jakobson, Professor Emeritus, Harvard University and M.I.T.; Everett Kleinjans, former Chancellor, The East-West Center; William Labov, Professor, Department of Linguistics, University of Pennsylvania; Gardner Lindzey, Director, Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences; Robert M. Lumiansky, President, American Council of Learned Societies; Laura Nader, Professor, Department of Anthropology, University of California-Berkeley; Eugene A. Nida, Director of Translations, American Bible Society; Lita Osmundsen, Director of Research, Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research; Gordon N. Ray, President, John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation; *Harley C. Shands, M.D., The Roosevelt Hospital; Sol Tax, Professor Emeritus, Department of Anthropology, The University of Chicago; O. Meredith Wilson, Director Emeritus, Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences; and Harry Woolf, Director, The Institute for Advanced Study.

The Research Center was a pioneer in the quick but expert publication of scholarly books and journals in the fields that fall, broadly speaking, within its purview. Over the decades, we composed in-house, and at cost disseminated world-wide, many hundreds of monographs and serials. Eventually, with the emergence of major innovations in printing and production technology, and a consequent attempt by Indiana University to centralize virtually all phases of publishing throughout the system, our activities in this area—with the important exception of certain specific editorial functions—were gradually curtailed, transferred without, or left to the academic units concerned with the subject to carry out at will. For instance, in 1968 we founded a periodical, *Language Sciences*, 48 issues of which were published over the ensuing decade. The global reputation of our enterprises is well illustrated by the fact that all rights to what we had thought of simply as our own “house-organ” were purchased from the Center, in 1978, by the International Christian University of Tokyo, which has already brought out several new issues, retaining our title and the recognition that goes with it.

Over the last few years, the Center has concentrated on its principal goals—the carrying out, promotion, and management of a variety of basic and practical investigations in the fields of the language sciences and semiotics—and we now need to specify exactly what these entail and to give several representative examples. Newly added responsibilities include the further systematic development of exciting undergraduate and graduate teaching programs, as is also detailed below.

Just what does it mean to be a “Center,” in contrast to, say, other types of academic units? William Safire recently offered his own, perhaps a trifle sardonic, definition: “To be a center is to be diversified and complex, and at the same time to be the cynosure of all eyes.” Let us check over the sort of things that we actually do, and the extent to which we merit the appellation of an exemplar.

The Scope of Our Current Inquiries

Semiotics is the scientific study of all signs and all manner of sign functions. Sign functions are also variously known as “communication,” “understanding,” “interpretation,” “information,” and “interaction,” as well as, more technically, “semiosis.” Semiotics includes the most characteristic operation of all living organisms: the interchange of messages, which, simply put, consists of the moving of information from one place to another and from one time to another. Competent communication requires the material presence of an object which refers back to something other than itself. An object of this sort is a sign. The process of referring back, called a sign process, may take many forms. For a medical doctor, for instance, a given spot on an X-ray may signify a tumor in a patient’s lung; for a meteorologist, a rise in barometric pressure may provide a clue to the next day’s weather; for an anthropologist, the verbal and nonverbal complex of reciprocal gift-giving reveals essential elements of the social organization of a people; to a political scientist, the perception of a shift in some aspect of public comportment may signal a change in the underlying ideology; in a judicial setting, a fingerprint may lead to the identification and conviction of a criminal; to a man face-to-face with a snarling dog, the behavior may telegraph the dog’s intention to attack. Thus it is clear that semiotics embraces most of the arts and humanities, the social and behavioral sciences, and some of the fundamental life sciences, notably ethology, genetics, and physiology.

Semiotics—which has its Western roots in Hippocratic medicine—is a far more ancient subject of study than any of the individual scientific disciplines, and it is therefore particularly suited to relieve these, at least partially, of their specialized concentration and technical jargon. In other words, semiotics is an interdisciplinary study *par excellence*, which comprehends all actual and conceivable message exchanges, whether verbal or not, whether the interactants are humans or speechless creatures, and

even when the interchange is with or among artifacts, such as computers. The most formalized branch of semiotics is linguistics, confined to the study of verbal messages; the IU teaching and research programs, however, are equally concerned with human communication by nonverbal means, including facial expression, gaze and mutual gaze, gesture, and posture, as well as sign languages, whether of the deaf, of aboriginal peoples, or used in certain monasteries, and the signal codes employed in various trades and sports, and, notably, in the communicative behavior of every species of animal.

The search for theoretical foundations and for an interdisciplinary basis among the sciences is usually labeled General Semiotics, a subject most extensively developed so far by the great American philosopher and polymath, Charles S. Peirce, in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Our sister campus in Indianapolis houses the Peirce Edition Project, which is the world's most important workshop for the all-inclusive study of Peirce's semiotic, and with which our Center maintains intimate links. Another branch of the field, Comparative Semiotics, is particularly concerned with the articulation of common methodological principles and the establishment of reasonable terminological unity. A third, Applied Semiotics, involves the practical applications of empirical researches in various organisms, channels of communication, sensory modalities, and different types of codes, as these occur throughout various media. Workers in Applied Semiotics tend to be deeply interested in reflecting on aesthetic experience, whether literary, musical, involving any of the visual arts, or such syncretic forms as the ballet, the circus, the film, the theatre, and so forth. Thus, in the widest sense, semiotics may ultimately be regarded as a constellation of beliefs, values, and techniques shared by a dramatically increasing global community of scholars, and thought of as a unifying matrix underlying and crosscutting what Peirce called the nomological sciences of man, and Jean Piaget termed the nomothetic (or law-seeking) sciences.

SEMIOTICS AT INDIANA UNIVERSITY

Research Activities and Publication of Results

The Center has provided, and continues to provide, a uniquely convenient home for an exceptional number of important international, national, regional, and local activities in semiotics, including notably the language sciences. In the mid-1950's, the *Journal of American Folklore*, and several associated monograph series, were edited at the Center, on the American Folklore Society's behalf. This activity contributed in a direct and crucial way to the eventual creation and consolidation of the University's world-famous Folklore Institute.

From 1969 through the middle of the past decade, the Center came to play a pivotal role in the daily life of the Linguistic Society of America, because the Secretary-Treasurer (later Vice President and President) of this, the largest and most influential professional organization of linguists, and his supporting staff, were located at or managed out of the Center. Even earlier, for eight arduous weeks in the Summer of 1964, one of the largest and most productive Linguistic Institutes, with 40 visiting faculty members assembled from 28 U.S. and foreign institutions, and involving, as well, 12 local faculty members plus 13 supporting scholars associated with several special seminars, offered 75 courses to about a thousand students and other visitors, with outside financial assistance from 22 sponsoring organizations, over and above the regular University budgets. No less than ten additional meetings, conferences, and symposia were featured simultaneously, all this under the Center's supervision, a complex set of responsibilities assigned to us, within three vast buildings turned over to our temporary care, by President Elvis Stahr.

In 1972, the National Endowment for the Humanities commissioned the Center to produce a reading list in linguistics, which was later published in two successive issues (Vol. III. Nos. 1-2, No. 4, 1973) of the Endowment's *Humanities*.

Today, the Center is the nodal point for the far-flung editorial activities of the International Association for Semiotic Studies. The Editor-in-Chief, working out of the Center, coordinates the publication of *Semiotica*, a bimonthly journal consisting of about 200 pages per issue. The headquarters of the Association are in Italy; the Managing Editor is located in The Netherlands; the printer is in the United Kingdom; and the publisher operates out of West Berlin, with subsidiary offices in The Hague and in a suburb of Manhattan. The contributing authors—we publish both in English and in French, occasionally in German—may send us articles from any continent. We have, so far, produced 34 volumes of *Semiotica* since it was started just over a decade ago, or, as simple arithmetic will reveal, printed about 12,000 pages in all.

In the past, the Center has undertaken editorial projects on a very vast scale, and at least one of these is worth noting: *Current Trends in Linguistics*, a series consisting of 14 volumes spread over 20 huge tomes, adding up to nearly 17,000 printed pages. The preparation of this universal reference work, on every aspect of linguistics and beyond, cost—excluding the expenses of the publisher—about \$300,000, paid for entirely by funding agencies outside the University, chiefly different branches of the federal government and Canadian granting agencies. In the 13 years between the appearance of the first volume (1963) and the publication of a concluding *Index* (1976), it drew into the Center's collaborative circle of friends just about every major figure in the language sciences. All in all, it was the single most encyclopedic enterprise ever brought to a successful conclusion in this field.

On a more modest scale, but still aiming at fairly sweeping coverage, I might mention our recent single-volume handbook, designed and executed at the Center, *How Animals Communicate* (1977), consisting of 38 chapters (1, 128 pp.), covering not only major theoretical issues, including the phylogeny and ontogeny of communication, but also the chief mechanisms of communication (viz., optical, acoustic, olfactory and gustatory, tactile, electric, etc.), and providing detailed surveys of communicative processes in numerous groups throughout the entire animal kingdom, from cephalopods (e.g., squids, cuttlefish, octopuses, argonauts) to monkeys and apes, and even man. More or less comparable undertakings which have been carried out at the Center and are now published or in press deal with such semiotic topics as *Portraits of Linguists: A Biographical Source Book for the History of Western Linguistics, 1746-1963* (in two vols.; 1966); *Aboriginal Sign Languages of the Americas and Australia* (in two vols.; 1978); *Speaking of Apes: A Critical Anthology of Two-Way Communication With Man* (1979); *Monastic Sign Languages* (1980); and *The Semiotic Web: An Annotated Anthology* (1980).

The Center has sponsored many scientific meetings, colloquia, and symposia over the years, most of which have resulted in still other publications or have led to some specific administrative action. Among the latter may be counted the Indiana University Museum, now directed by Professor Wesley R. Hurt, which was created as a direct consequence of a nationwide conference convened by the Center, in 1958, with the aid of generous funding by the Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research, on the topic, "The Place of Museums in Higher Education." In 1968, the Center organized the only Salzburg Seminar in American Studies (Session 116) ever devoted to linguistics.

Published reports of other events in which the Center has been involved, usually as the sponsor or a co-sponsor, but always as the recipient of outside grants or contracts defraying the participants' expenses, include: *Myth: A Symposium* (1958, 1965), *Style in Language* (1960, 1964, 1966), *Approaches to Semiotics* (1964, 1972), *Approaches to Animal Communication* (1969), *The Tell-Tale Sign* (1975), *A Perfusion of Signs* (1977), *Sight, Sound, and Sense* (1978), among a multitude of others. In October 1979, the Center hosted three conventions: the First U.S./Polish Bilateral Symposium, on "Semiotic Systems and Their Functions"; the 4th Annual Meeting of the Semiotic Society of America; and a special set of sessions of the Charles S. Peirce Society. In May 1980, the Center took the lead in organizing a three-day international conference and workshop, under the sponsorship of The New York Academy of Sciences, on "The Clever Hans Phenomenon: Communication Processes Among Horses, Whales, Apes, and People," the proceedings of which were edited at the Center and recently published in the Academy's *Annals*.

In addition to *Semiotica*, already mentioned as having been edited since its founding in 1969 at the Center, it should be noted that the administrative headquarters for the Semiotic Society of America, by far the largest national organization of its kind, are also located at the Center, which is responsible for the publication and dissemination of the Society's quarterly bulletin, *Semiotic Scene*. Furthermore, seven book series are currently edited at the Center: *Advances in Semiotics* (Indiana University Press), *Topics in Contemporary Semiotics* (Plenum), *Approaches to Semiotics* (Mouton/de Gruyter), *Topics in Languages and Linguistics* (Plenum), *Animal Communication* (Indiana University Press), *The Best of Semiotica* (Mouton/de Gruyter), and the newly launched *Series in Nonverbal Behavior* (Newbury House).

This brings me to a brief description of two major research projects the Center is engaged in, one started six years ago, the other begun a year and a half ago, but preparations for which go back all the way to 1975.

In the Summer of 1976, the Center initiated an open-ended quest to investigate the proper function of nonverbal communication in the teaching of foreign languages. The opening phase of this project, funded by the U.S. Office of Education, was based on the contention that traditional methods of language teaching, concentrating on the acquisition of a vocabulary and a set of grammatical rules, give the student only part of the information needed in order to communicate successfully in a foreign language setting. These methods generally ignore the broader rules of communicative competence—the rules that govern what the speaker may say, when he may say it, and the manner in which he may say it—and thus leave the student with a “cultural accent.” In order to help alleviate this deficiency, the Center is developing instructional materials on nonverbal communication for teachers of foreign languages. In the first year, 1976-77, we produced a handbook for language teachers in general, acquainting them with the importance of nonverbal elements in communication and recommending methods for introducing these elements into the classroom. In the second year, we applied the results of the previous year's work to one specific culture area, Japanese, and developed an illustrated manual for teachers of that language, as well as a 20-minute, 16 mm. instructional film (subsidized by a special gift from the Japan Foundation). In the third year, the same techniques were applied to Gulf Arabic. In 1980 the U.S. Department of Education awarded the Center further funds to prepare a Handbook on Nonverbal Communication in Brazil for Teachers of Portuguese. This summer the research results will be evaluated by teachers of Brazilian Portuguese throughout the United States. In 1980 the Center also received an award from the National Endowment for the Humanities to prepare a Handbook on Nonverbal Communication for Teachers of English as a Foreign Language. The goal of this project was to isolate and describe the most important nonverbal signs employed by American English speakers in

day-to-day interaction, emphasizing those that seem most likely to be ambiguous or that are accorded primary communicative significance by Americans. Copies of the completed manuscript recently were sent to the directors of the most important centers for the teacher of English as foreign language for their suggestions, criticisms, and experimental use in the classroom.

In 1975, the Center was entrusted by the International Association for Semiotic Studies, convening in Milan, with the organization and management of another vast undertaking: the preparation of a 350,000-word *Encyclopedic Dictionary of Semiotics*. It has taken us four years of careful preparation to embark upon this far-flung attempt to establish a standard reference tool which, we hope, will endure at least for the rest of this century. The project, to be completed this year, has been directed out of the Center by an Editor-in-Chief, aided by an Editorial Board with representatives from six other countries: Canada, France, Italy, Poland, the United Kingdom, and West Berlin. The resulting work—with contributions from the best minds available anyplace on earth—will be produced by a consortium of publishers, led by the Indiana University Press and Macmillan (of Great Britain), eventually to be joined by others. The assembly of the manuscript is being financed by benefactions from the U.S. government and the Federal Republic of Germany, as well as donations from such public and private sources as the Rockefeller Foundation and the Wenner-Gren Foundation, among others.

Before concluding this section, I should mention, by way of a summary, that recent investigations by Center staff leading to major publications have focused upon the history and theory of semiotics, patterns of nonverbal interaction in many cultures, animal communication (especially between man and animal), the analysis of advertisements, prefigurements of art, and various literary and folkloristic applications.

Teaching

In 1978, the Graduate School inaugurated a doctoral minor in Semiotic Studies—at present administered out of the Center, with the cooperation of a faculty committee appointed by the Dean of the Graduate School—the requirements for which generally call for the completion of three courses in Semiotic Studies, one in Philosophy, and one from a related area. The courses in Semiotic Studies proper include an introductory course, a course on the semiotic doctrine of Charles S. Peirce, and a third course the content of which varies depending on the current instructor's area of interest. One year, for example, topics included the sign language of the deaf, semiotic approaches to folklore, and semiotic approaches to detective stories featuring Sherlock Holmes and James Bond. Topics to be taught in the immediate future will include, among others, semiotics of the dance and semiotics and ethology. Provision is also made for individually tailored,

guided readings leading to research for an M.A. thesis or Ph.D. dissertation. Related fields at present are defined as Anthropology, Comparative Literature (including Film Studies), English, Fine Arts, Folklore, Instructional Systems Technology, Journalism, Linguistics, Music, Philosophy, Psychology, Reading Education, Religious Studies, Speech Communication, and Speech and Hearing.

Responding to undergraduate demand, Indiana University faculty members interested in semiotics—particularly on the Bloomington campus, where they are active not only throughout a dozen or so departments and programs of the College of Arts and Sciences, but also in the School of Education and other major units—are currently preparing a proposal, for ultimate approval by the Higher Education Commission, to create a Certificate in Semiotic Studies. Simultaneously, the Center has submitted a major proposal for federal funding to assist the University in carrying out its undergraduate teaching objectives during the initial three years. This program of study is intended to start in the Fall of 1980. Planning for the consolidation of teaching in this field began with a Pilot Program in Semiotics in the Humanities, initiated and organized by the Center, and sponsored by the National Endowment for the Humanities. The tangible proceedings of the Pilot Program, which ran through the academic year 1975-76, are incorporated in the book, *Sight, Sound, and Sense* (1978).

In June and July of 1979, the Center conducted the first Summer Seminar in the nation devoted exclusively to semiotics. The seminar, supported under the prestigious auspices of the National Endowment for the Humanities, was entitled “Semiotics as Foundation for the Human Sciences.” The 12 participants were all carefully selected college teachers, gathered in Bloomington from coast to coast, representing fields as diverse as philosophy, French literature, Russian literature, art, biology, cultural anthropology, and linguistics.

Institutional Connections

In line with its policy to seek and foster links with organizations, wherever these may be located, that have aims comparable to the Center’s, we took the initiative in convening the first meeting of representatives of each of the 11 member-universities that compose the Committee on Institutional Cooperation (i.e., “the Big Ten” and the University of Chicago), to discuss ongoing work in semiotic studies on the individual campuses and to plan for the future. The group now has met several times. Palpable results of these meetings include a published “survey of semiotic resources in the Midwest,” contributions toward the preparation of a highly useful report on the state of the semiotics curriculum in 32 institutions of higher education located all over the United States, and a proposal (submitted to several funding agencies) for the development of semiotics on the university campuses of the CIC system.

The Center seeks to establish transnational bonds in many different ways, only a few of which can be touched upon in this article. For instance, in 1978, we joined in creating a consortium of four universities—Brown, Indiana, Warsaw, and Yale—which together entered into an unprecedented Bilateral Exchange Agreement specifically in the field of semiotics. As already mentioned, the first conference under this Agreement—with welcome additional support from the William and Mildred Zelosky Trust, plus modest federal assistance, and with the participation of nine distinguished scholars from Poland—took place in Bloomington three days before the very successful 4th Annual Meeting of the Semiotic Society of America.

In June 1978, the Center was represented at a meeting convened, in Budapest, by the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, in the course of which negotiations were opened for what may turn out to be a Bilateral Exchange Agreement similar to that which we already have with the University of Warsaw.

Finally, the Center is actively seeking ways and means to further solidify and formalize our already cordial relationships with colleagues in Brazil, Canada, Japan, and West Germany. Thus the prospects for worldwide cooperation in semiotics never looked brighter, and the Center is both proud and delighted to be an energetic partner in this continuing search for intellectual adventure and excellence.